

THE MISTAKES  
OF  
MODERN  
NONCONFORMITY

BY  
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VICAR OF ST. AUSTELL AND CANON OF TRURO

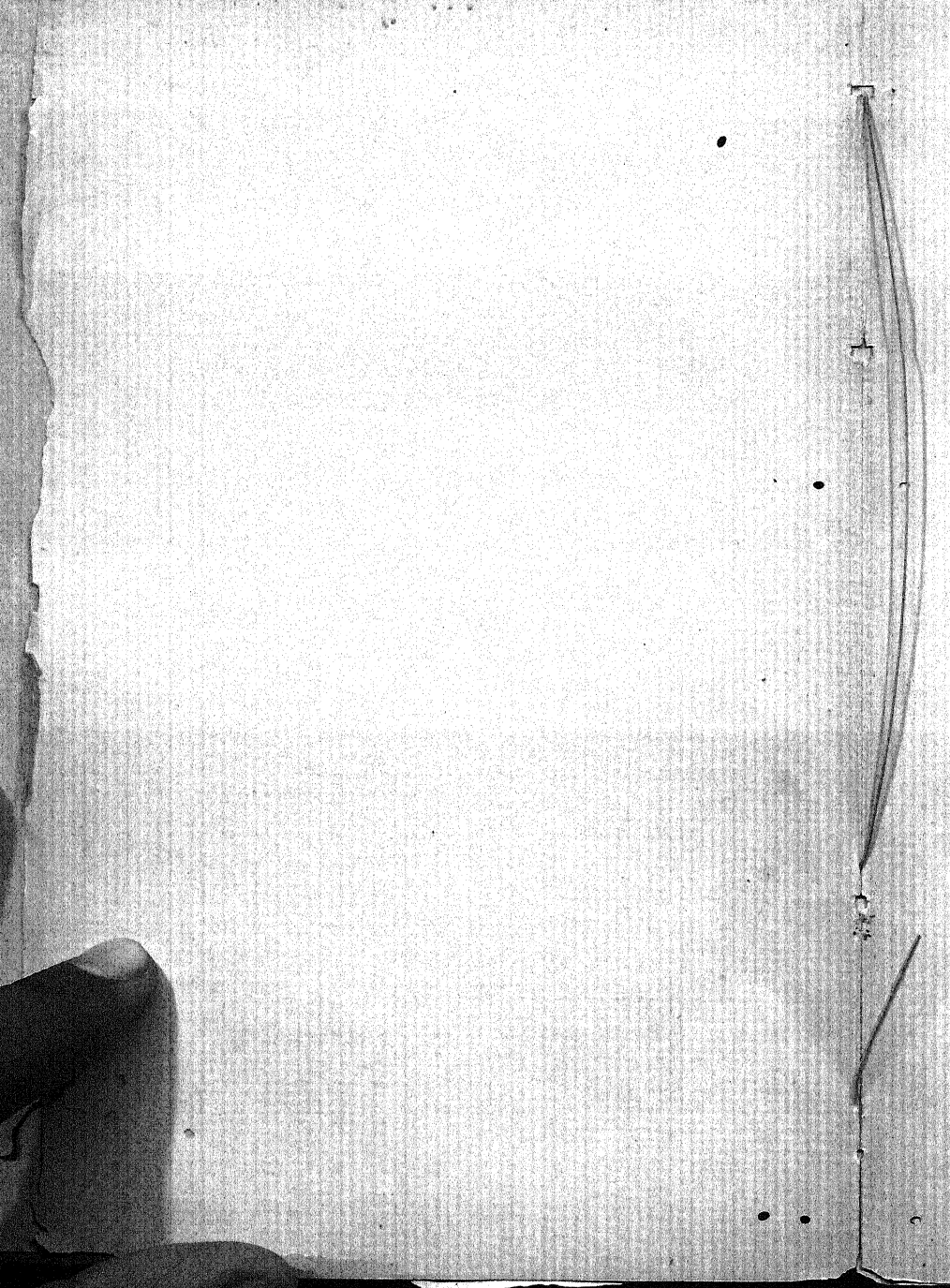
"Exemption from mistake is not the privilege of mortals . . . and the man who, on discovering his errors, acknowledges and corrects them, is scarcely less entitled to our esteem than if he had not erred."

*The Nonconformist* Dr. PYE SMITH

LONDON  
LONGMANS, GREEN, & CO.  
AND NEW YORK: 15 EAST 16<sup>th</sup> STREET

1895

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## PREFACE

THE kind reception and the patient hearing which I had at the Reunion Conference held at Lucerne in 1893, when I pleaded almost alone for the ancient and Catholic view of the Church, led me to hope that I might render some little service to our religion, in the way of healing its unhappy divisions, if I accepted an invitation to attend a similar Conference at Grindelwald in 1894.

Accordingly I did attend, and, taking my courage with both hands, I read before an audience largely composed of Nonconformists, a paper on "The Mistakes of Modern Nonconformity."

This paper was printed in the *Church Times* of August 11th and 18th, and it would seem to have afforded some instruction to the readers of that journal, if I may judge from the letters I received, urging that it should be reissued in book form.

I have therefore, after many delays, caused by the pressure of parochial work, revised it, and it now appears as Part I. of this volume. I have also, in the hope of adding to its usefulness, considered in Part II. a number of Nonconformist *misconceptions*—Part I. deals rather

with practical mistakes—misconceptions as to Bible and Anglican teaching on the Church and its ministry. It is quite true that with some of these I have professed to deal already; but as they cropped up again, with surprising vitality, at the Conference, and as they are deeply rooted in the Dissenting mind, it seemed to me that it would be most unwise to ignore them altogether here. I have treated them, however, with the greatest possible brevity.

In the next portion of the book (Part III.) I have replied to most, if not all, of the objections to the doctrines or usages of the English Church, which were raised at Grindelwald. There was no adequate opportunity afforded me of replying to them then, and as these are among the standing difficulties of Dissenters, I have eagerly embraced this opportunity of considering them.

I venture to hope that in this extended form, this treatise will constitute a brief and handy *MANUAL* on the main points of the controversy between Churchmen and Nonconformists.

It only remains for me to notice one misconception to which the paper itself gave rise. I was told that it was an ungracious and profitless task to dwell on the mistakes of any religious community. But I beg leave to point out, first, that this is precisely what Dissenters have been doing these last three centuries. It has only been by enlarging, and that copiously and persistently, on *our* errors or supposed errors, that they have justified their existence as separate denominations. They have

not been slow to speak of our mistakes, and they have not always called them by so inoffensive a name. And I remark, secondly, that there is a very practical and urgent reason for exposing these mistakes, as we conceive them to be, namely, that these are the very things which have caused separation, and which now hinder reunion. And I observe, lastly, that if Dissenters were nothing to us, then we might perhaps be justified in leaving them severely alone; but if they are, as I hold them to be, our brethren in Christ, then we owe it to them and to Christ, humbly and patiently and kindly to point out their misconceptions and misbeliefs, which is all that, in these pages, I have attempted to do.

VICARAGE, ST. AUSTELL,  
*Lady Day, 1895.*

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## INTRODUCTION.

"THERE is nothing in this world," said the late common-sense Lord Derby, "no more fertile source of quarrels and ill-feeling than the attempt to cover up, under vague and ambiguous phrases, expressing kindly sentiment, but expressing little else, the existence of real doubt or real difference as to what each party in a contract is entitled to." It seems to me that this witness is true, and that this is one danger, perhaps the chief danger, which threatens the amiable and praiseworthy efforts which are now being made to promote the reunion of Christians. We are tempted by the very instincts of courtesy, by the longing for peace, by the desire to spare each other pain, to keep something back, to suppress our honest and deep-seated convictions in order to patch up a temporary truce. Yet nothing could be more fatal to the sacred cause which we desire to serve. If any reunion that is worthy of the name is to be brought about, any reunion that is to be peaceful and permanent, it can only be by our making a clean breast of our real beliefs, and by *saying*, openly and face to face, what we cannot help *thinking*. Of course we must "speak the truth *in love*"—a true Christian cannot do otherwise—but speak it we must, and the more plainly and courageously the better. It is this conviction that emboldens me to deal

with some of the mistakes—as I conceive them to be—of modern Nonconformity. For I believe and shall always maintain, until otherwise persuaded, that our present state of *disunion*, our humiliating and paralysing divisions, the reproach of our English Christianity, are largely due to the mistaken action, the result of the erroneous ideas, of Nonconformists. I hold that as Dissent began in a mistake—an honest mistake, if you will, but still a mistake—so it is perpetuated by a series of mistakes, and thrives on a tissue of misconceptions (I will call them by no harsher name: for the most part they deserve no harsher name), and I conceive that I shall best serve the cause of reunion—than which nothing is nearer to my heart—if I point out, firmly but affectionately, what those mistakes and misconceptions are. I earnestly hope that our separated brethren will not resent my doing this; anyhow, I can promise that, so far as my treatment of the subject is concerned, they shall have no just *cause* for resentment. “I will take no man’s liberty of judgment from him”—I borrow the words of Chillingworth—“neither shall any man take mine from me. I will think no man the worse man nor the worse Christian, I will love no man the less, for differing in opinion from me. And what measure I mete to others, I expect from them again.”

But it may be well, it may contribute to a good understanding, if, before I proceed further, I offer a few words of explanation, chiefly with respect to the title of this brief treatise. And the first word is this, that if any should think—because I treat exclusively of the “mistakes of *Nonconformity*”—that I overlook the mistakes or abuses or corruptions of the Church, they



are very much deceived. I do nothing of the kind. I *assume* that Churchmen are just as far from being immaculate and infallible as other Christians are; that *they* have made mistakes as well as Dissenters, and that they too have their share of misconceptions. But it is not for me to point them out here; you can hardly expect a man to blaze abroad his mother's frailties. I will only say that if Dissenters will tell us of our errors in the same spirit in which I speak of theirs, we shall be sincerely grateful to them. If plain speaking is good for them, it will be no less salutary for us. Secondly, I use the words "modern Nonconformity" because I think it well that the reader should know—what few Dissenters do know—that they are not the children or the heirs of the first Nonconformists; that they have but little in common with them, and that really the last name to which Dissenters are entitled, at the bar of history, is that of "Nonconformists." I hold, indeed, that it is a piece of affectation to deny that name (as I believe some of the clergy do) to Dissenters, but I also think that they ought not to be allowed to assume it, as they do, as their normal and proper designation, without a word of explanation, and indeed, of mild protest.

For that name, as every one familiar with the religious history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries knows perfectly well, belongs of right to the Puritans—to those members of the Church of England who did not conform to certain usages of the Church, such, for example, as kneeling at the Holy Supper, wearing the surplice and the wedding-ring, the sign of the Cross in Baptism, and so forth. They did not conform to these usages; on the contrary, they denounced them as relics of popery,

but they conformed *to the Church*; they remained in it, for the sake, as they believed, of reforming it. "The Puritans," says Mr. Gladstone, "who inclined to separate themselves from the Church of England were restrained by the belief that it was, though a corrupt, yet essentially a true Church, and therefore, as their historian Neal (iii. p. 52) states, that they were bound to continue in its communion,"<sup>1</sup> and continue they did, the Nonconformist Giffard, and the Nonconformist Ball, and Cartwright and Hildersham, and Rathband and Jacob, and, most distinguished of all, the Nonconformist Baxter, *clarum ac venerabile nomen*.<sup>2</sup> These are the Nonconformists properly so called; those who now bear this name were, in those days, always called Dissenters or Separatists. "Separatism," as Dr. Mackennal has told us,<sup>3</sup> "is really none other than the old word for what we now call Congregationalism." You will understand, therefore, why I speak of "modern Nonconformity." It is partly because the original Nonconformist, the Nonconformist properly so-called, was entirely exempt from some of the errors with which modern Dissenters are (in my opinion) chargeable. He was certainly free from what I regard as the capital blunder, *the* mistake, *par excellence*, of modern Nonconformity, of which I may now proceed to speak, and of which, as of the rest, I trust, after this explanation, I may speak without offence.

<sup>1</sup> *The State in its Relations with the Church*, vol. ii. p. 129 (1839).

<sup>2</sup> Baxter also mentions among "the old Nonconformists who wrote so much against separation," Brightman, Paget, Bradshaw, and Bayne.

<sup>3</sup> *Review of the Churches*, vol. ii. p. 311.

## PART I.

### THE MISTAKES OF NONCONFORMITY.

I. I HAVE just spoken of the chief and capital error of Dissenters. That error was, in my judgment, that they *withdrew* from the communion and fellowship of the Church. The first and the most fatal of their mistakes was that they *seceded*, as the Nonconformists did not, from the ancient and historic Society of Christ, or from the branch of it established in this country, because of its (real or supposed) corruptions, or, to meet the views of Congregationalists and Baptists, who hold that there is no other Church than the congregation, let me say that they separated from the congregations of Christians—Church Christians—then, as now, to be found in the many parishes of England.

Now let us be quite clear as to what a Christian may and must do in the presence of errors and abuses. It is allowed that when Dissent began in England there were errors and blemishes in the Church, or in the congregations, just as there are now; perhaps more than there are now. We may freely allow this, because no society composed of men, not even the Divine Society,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Church is a Divine Institution" (Dr. Mackennal, *Review of the Churches*, vol. ii. p. 310).

is, or can be, free from abuses and defects; it cannot be, just because it is composed of men, of men such as we are. There is no such thing as a pure Church. We are sometimes told that "the Church consists of the Christ-like." To us this almost sounds like Pharisaic cant, for what Christian dare say that he is Christ-like. No; the Church always is, always has been, always will be, more or less impure, and generally more than less. Every age has its errors and its defects. We are quite prepared to admit, therefore, that the reformed Church of England has had its full share of these. If it had not, we should have a difficulty in recognizing it as God's Church, for it would be utterly unlike the Church of which we read in the page of revelation. It would be unlike the Jewish Church, unlike the Church of the Gospels, unlike that of the Acts, unlike that of the Epistles. Yes; and it would also be unlike those earnest Dissenting communions which of late have claimed to be Churches. None of these is perfect; none, so far as I know, pretends to be such. I could fill pages, if necessary, with the testimonies of leading Dissenters not only to the errors or defects of *other* Dissenting bodies—that goes without the saying—but also to past errors or past defects in their own communion.

We are agreed then, first, that the Church, or, if you prefer it, the congregation, has, and has always had, its corruptions. We are also agreed, secondly, that it is the duty of every Christian who recognizes these corruptions to protest against them and to separate himself from them. We are agreed that he is not to acquiesce in them, not to hold his tongue and hope for better days. If he is profoundly convinced that the Church

teaches this or that untruth, or sanctions this or that superstition, then there is only one thing for him to do; he must "not give place, no, not for an hour." The truth is God's truth, and he has no right to trifle with it: the Church is God's Church, he must be no party to depraving it. If he stands alone, an *Athanasius contra mundum*, he must protest, he must testify his dissent, if he is not to be partaker of its sins. On this point I believe that intelligent Churchmen and intelligent Dissenters are thoroughly agreed.

But if this is so, then it follows that so far as Dissenters have merely protested against corruptions, or even supposed corruptions, in the Church, and so long as they have combated them, they have done their Christian duty, and no more. We may, of course, think them mistaken in their views; indeed, we know, as a matter of fact, that some of them were mistaken; we know it, because we see that their descendants have adopted many of the usages and some of the doctrines against which earlier Dissenters protested and for the sake of which they separated—I have given a list of these elsewhere<sup>1</sup>—we may think them, I say, mistaken, or self-opinionated, or bigoted, but otherwise we cannot blame them, and I do not know that any sensible Churchman does blame them, for protesting against what they sincerely believed to be pernicious error. We should rather blame them and despise them if they had not protested.

But, unfortunately, most unfortunately, for our common

<sup>1</sup> See *Church or Chapel?* ch. xvii. ("The Church justified of its Nonconformist Children"), and *English Nonconformity and Christ's Christianity*, pp. 226-229.

Christianity, for the religion of peace and charity, most unfortunately for us and for themselves, Dissenters did not stop there. It has always been a difficult thing to know where to stop, and that is just what they did not know; it was here they made their great and terrible mistake. They said that it was not enough to protest and resist, not enough to separate themselves from the errors and abuses, but they must also separate from the *society* into which those errors had crept; they must withdraw from the *persons* who tolerated them. They fancied that conscience required them to come out of a communion that was impure, as well as to dissociate themselves from its impurities; and so they seceded from the Church, they insisted on breaking up the Society of Christ, the same which He founded, and founded to carry on His work in the world; they broke from it, and they proceeded to set up rival societies in competition with His. Because the historic Christian "body" was corrupt, or more corrupt than they had expected it to be, they renounced it and founded new bodies—a Baptist "body" and a Wesleyan "body," and so forth. They declined to do what the Nonconformists did and besought them to do—namely, to protest and remain;<sup>1</sup> no, separate they would, and separate they did. And I contend that this was the most deplorable and agonizing of mistakes. I have no hesitation in saying that, if it was the Spirit of God that led them to

<sup>1</sup> "As for those of the separation, who have confuted them more than we; who have written more against them?" (The Nonconformist Parker, *On the Cross*, part 2, ch. ix.). "The separation being now begun, the Nonconformists set themselves with the greatest vehemence against it" (Stillingfleet, *Unreasonableness of Separation*, p. 27).



protest, it was the spirit of evil that led them to secede. I know that there are those who glory in separation. People are constantly doing it. To me it appears to be one of the saddest and maddest and most un-Christian things the world has ever seen. And I will now put down some few reasons for coming to this conclusion.

But, first, let me say that I am not now concerned to prove that separation was a *sin*. I have done that, as I venture to think, conclusively elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> To me it appears to admit of no doubt. If the Church is a Church at all, then it must be God's Church. And if it be God's Church, and He has placed us in it—and He did put us into it at our baptism—then it must be a sin to leave it so long as He has not left it. This, surely, is plain and undeniable.<sup>2</sup> But this is not the question now before us, which is not the sins, but the mistakes of Nonconformity. I say, therefore, that, even if Dissent were

<sup>1</sup> In *English Nonconformity*, chs. v.-xii.

<sup>2</sup> This was certainly the idea of the first Dissenters. "None is to separate," say Johnson and Ainsworth, in the 36th Article of their *Confession of Faith*, "from a Church rightly gathered and established, for faults and corruptions which may, and so long as the Church consisteth of mortal men will, fall out and arise among them, even in true constituted churches, but by due order to seek the redress thereof." It was because they held that the Church of England was not a true Church that they accounted separation from it lawful. "I think that these parish assemblies," said Barrowe, "as they stand generally in England, are not the true established Churches of Christ." And again, "I cannot come to your Church . . . because you have a false and antichristian ministry set over your Church." Dr. Mackennal allows (*Review of the Churches*, vol. ii. p. 310) that "some of the older separatists declared the wickedness of persons who were members of the National Church."



lawful, it still would be every way injurious and disastrous, injurious to the Church, injurious to the Dissenter, injurious to Christ's religion.

But the proof of these propositions—that separation is injurious to the Church, to the Separatists, and to our holy religion, I can only put before the reader in the barest outline. If I did more, I should have little or no space to treat of other “mistakes of modern Non-conformists.” And nothing more is needed; no thoughtful Christian denies that our divisions are an unspeakable disgrace and misery.

I say then, first, that it must have been injurious to the *Church* that pious Dissenters should leave it. Let us allow that the Church was, and is, frightfully corrupt; that, like the Church of Sardis, it “has a name to live, but is dead.” Let us further allow that Dissenters are better men than Churchmen, more enlightened and more spiritual. Then I say that the worse the Church is, and the better the separatists are, the greater the injury they do it in deserting it. It can never be for the good of any society, secular or religious, that its best men should come out of it. That can only mean one thing, namely, that it is left weaker and worse than it was before. You see, I have no need to vilify or disparage Dissenters, of whatever type they were: the better men you make them out to be, the greater the injury they did the Church when they withdrew from it.

I pass to the next point, that secession was injurious to the *seceders themselves*. But first I must deal with a possible objection. You may say, perhaps, that they would have violated their conscience, and so injured their character and their Christianity had they remained.

But the answer to that is that they could not do so, had they made it clear, as they easily could do, and as the original Nonconformists did, that they repudiated these errors, and that they remained, among other things, for the sake of reforming them. It is a fixed idea in many minds that they must withdraw from any and every community with which they are not in thorough accord, but it is a pure hallucination. Not a syllable can be cited from Scripture to support it. The result of acting on that principle may presently be that there is no communion good enough for you to remain in. No, these Dissenters might have protected their conscience by protesting and resisting, but they preferred to separate—it is always so much easier to do that—and in so doing they injured themselves. One thing they did was to teach others to separate from them on every pretext, or without any pretext at all; it was to initiate and encourage that long process of division and sub-division which has gone on, with steadily increasing force, down to our own days, and which has desolated the denominations as well as the Church. For whatever they may think about separation from the Church, they all recognize the endless mischief occasioned by the repeated and quite gratuitous secessions from their own particular bodies. "Methodists," says the present Chairman of the Congregational Union, Dr. Barrett, "used to be strong in the rural districts, but they are deplorably weakened by subdivisions. How can any one view with satisfaction a Primitive Methodist chapel and a Free Methodist chapel in the same village. The spirit of rivalry inevitably creeps in and . . . in practice, the system almost always works badly. The truest friends,"

he adds, somewhat paradoxically, "of Nonconformist principles, are those who strive most earnestly for the promotion of unity."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, an American Congregationalist goes so far as to say, "If the State, without injustice to any, could provide houses of worship, and make it impossible for the crudities and puerilities of individuals to raise unseemly competition and controversy in things ecclesiastical, and then leave the administration of its affairs to the spiritual body, the history of the Church in future would record a constant series of victories"<sup>2</sup> But another thing they did was to cramp their sympathies, and jeopardise their character. One cannot exchange Catholicity for Sectarianism—and all that Sectarianism means—without moral and spiritual hurt. I have only to remind you of the strifes and jealousies, the bickerings and animosities, yes, and the fierce and feminine hatreds which Dissent has engendered, both in Churchmen and in Dissenters, to show what an injury it has been to both. I may mention that the *Congregational Year Book* for 1871 bears witness that our divisions "breed in all a miserable sectarianism, than which nothing is more inimical to the spirit of Christianity. Each minute fragment shouts 'the Temple of the Lord are we,' and declares the claims of all others to be inferior, if not false. Zeal for the denomination or for 'the interest' takes the place of zeal for Christ." It adds that "much of the bitterness and narrowness of soul complained of in our country churches is due to these unchristian rivalries."

But it is on the injury done to our religion, to Christ's

<sup>1</sup> *British Weekly*, May 10th, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Bradford, *The Pilgrim in Old England*.

holy and august religion, that I rest my case. Dissent has impaired its appearance, arrested its progress, weakened its authority, silenced its voice : it is doing all this to-day. I will not speak here of the mere waste and friction, of the over-lapping and confusion, of the poaching and proselytizing which have followed, and must follow, in its wake : it has much, much more to answer for than that ; it has compromised and degraded our Christianity. It has made this gracious religion a laughing-stock, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us ; it has taught its enemies to insult and to blaspheme ; it has furnished them with an excuse for deriding its claims. "It is a matter of merriment," says a Hindoo, writing in the *Times*, "to see the different sects of Christians here keeping up an incessant warfare with each other." "My sons," said an old African chief, "want me to be baptized. I say to them, 'Christians here won't speak to Christians *there*. When one of them has converted the other, it will be time to come to me.'" And from all parts of the mission field we hear the same complaint. "The Christianity of our outpost settlements," says Dr. Barry, late Primate of Australia, "is simply being destroyed by our divisions." "In our present divided state," says a venerable Presbyterian missionary, Dr. Williamson, "we will never Christianize China, never!" "The world," writes Dr. Milligan, "will never be converted by a disunited Church." I think I could fill many pages with proofs of the infinite injury which secession has done to Christ's religion. I hope, however, that enough has been said to prove that Dissenters, however earnest they were, however jealous for the truth of God, made a terrible mistake when they



insisted on separating. Even if I allow that separation did some good, still the remedy has been ten times worse than the disease.

II. But I must now turn at once to a second mistake, which I must treat with great brevity. I respectfully submit to Dissenters, that it is a further, though minor, mistake for those who, in their own persons or those of their forefathers, made the separation to charge those who remained with *schism*. It is constantly done; it is only to save time that I forbear to give a host of instances. I will give two—fair samples they are of the language which is constantly used. I learn from the *Barnet Press*,<sup>1</sup> that the chairman of Herts Congregational Union, after testifying that "the clergy of the Church were men whom he loved and honoured," etc., observed that "as a Church, she would have none of them," and then said, "I thank God the sin of this awful schism lies not with the Nonconformist Churches." Similarly, the *Freeman* of August 24 declares, "We charge the Church of England with the sin of schism, inasmuch as now, as in the seventeenth century, it refuses membership to those who will not conform to its standards," etc.<sup>2</sup> Now, I am very far from affirming that the Church is innocent, that she has done nothing to provoke a separation, but I do say that Churchmen have not made one. We did not go out from them; it was they, as history

<sup>1</sup> April 4th, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> The writer labours under the delusion that Nonconformists are excommunicate by virtue of canons, which say that they *are to be*, in certain cases, excommunicated. No one is, or can be, excommunicated, except by formal sentence. See *Church or Chapel?* pp. 75, 76; see below, p. 43. Moreover, the Church regards every baptized person as a member of the body.



shows, who went out from us. Our records, and theirs, show *when* it was that they separated and set up rival "churches." It is a mistake, therefore, to say that we made the rupture, and the more so as there was never, so far as we can see—and on their own showing, too—any reason for the rupture.<sup>1</sup> Yes, and let me say here, it is equally a mistake to reproach Churchmen, as is often done, with *dichostasia*, or standing aloof; to resent it because, after you have left them and repudiated them, and expressly declined to remain with them any longer, they will not forthwith come over to you and shake hands and say we are all one. I only mention this, I may say here, because it is a "root of bitterness," because it tends to exasperate our present relations and to hinder reunion. It is largely misconceptions—misconceptions and temper—which keep us apart. And one misconception of Dissenters, one which evolves temper, both on their part and on ours, is that it is only pride or bigotry that now impels us to stand aloof from their pulpits and assemblies. For why—it is obvious to ask—should it be more pride and bigotry on our part than it was on theirs? They said that they could not remain with us, could not worship in our churches, for conscientious reasons; they virtually said, by separating, that we were not fit for them to worship with,<sup>2</sup> and they

<sup>1</sup> The reasons which Dissenters now allege as alone sufficient to justify secession (as, for example, in the *British Weekly* of April 20, 1888) do not apply to any of the secessions which have taken place within the last four centuries. In other words, past secessions are condemned by the present principles of Nonconformists.

<sup>2</sup> "The very separating is a tacit and practical condemning of our churches, if not as false, yet as impure" (Westminster Assembly).

now say that conscience will not allow them to return to us. But is the "Nonconformist conscience" the only conscience in Christendom. Why may not Churchmen have similar reasons for abstaining from the various chapels to those which constrained Dissenters to leave our churches? Believe me, they have similar reasons, or some of them have. I yield to no man in my affection for Nonconformists or in my sincere esteem for their character, but I could not, I dare not, go to their chapels. I dare not, "because of the fear of God," because I honestly and unhesitatingly believe, rightly or wrongly, that it is against His will that every chapel in the land exists. The ministers may be, and I doubt not are, far better men than I am, and every way worthier to be God's minister than I am: all the same, I cannot, I dare not, recognize their ministrations, just because I believe in "*One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.*" I believe there are no more Churches many than "*Lords many*" and "*Gods many.*" Why, then, should my attitude be ascribed to superciliousness or bigotry? If those are not the reasons why Baptists and Wesleyans left us, why should they be the reasons which restrain us from going over to them? I say, then, that it is a mistake, and one which tends to embitter our relations, either that they should accuse us of having made the separation, or should ascribe it to pride of place that we do not now throw ourselves into their arms. God knows that some of us would only be too glad to do it, if we dared. If we stand aloof from those who stood apart, and still stand apart from us, it is because we dare do nothing else.

III. A third mistake, and one which, if persevered in,

must bar reunion, is that Nonconformists demand impossible conditions as the preliminary basis for discussions on reunion. I believe I am correct in saying that many Dissenters decline to discuss the subject except on what they call "equal terms." They say that they recognize the Church of England as a Church, and her pious clergy as Christ's ministers, and they therefore expect us to recognize their Churches and their ministers. They refuse to allow that their Church status or their ordinations can be a matter of debate. But it is obvious that this is begging the very question in dispute. They call it arrogance on our part to question their Church state, but they forget that, being firmly convinced that there is no visible Church but one, Christ's Church, the visible Society founded by Him, the Society which has come down to us from Pentecost, we cannot do otherwise. We have had as yet no particle of proof, not a shred, alleged in favour of polychurchism. How can those who believe (as all Christians did for many centuries) in "*one* Catholic and Apostolic Church" recognize a hundred "separate and independent Churches"?—which is what the denominations now claim to be. It is allowed that nothing of the kind is to be found in the Bible; all men can say is that "the Bible was written so many centuries ago." They forget, too, that although we deny that their religious bodies are "separate and independent Churches," we allow that they themselves—as many of them as have been duly baptized—are Churchmen, members of the one Society of God. We really assign them a higher place than they claim for themselves. What they demand of us is that we should also allow that they

are members of a "Wesleyan Church" or a "Baptist Church," and this, although they cannot tell us how we are to join this independent Church. I have asked again and again for information on this point—how a man becomes a member of the "Methodist Church." No one has been able to tell me: I venture to think that they are not able.<sup>1</sup> And the more so, when a few years ago all that Wesleyans claimed was that they belonged to the "Wesleyan Methodist Society," and when it is matter of history that the founder of that society warned them against calling the societies "Churches" or a "Church." Dissenters resent it, again, that we should question their orders, but they surely forget that some of their organs maintain that "there is no such thing as orders."<sup>2</sup> They resent it partly because of the conspicuous ability and the undoubted success of many of their ministers, but they forget that we do not recognize either the one or the

<sup>1</sup> This inquiry, which I have repeatedly addressed, but in vain, to leading Wesleyan ministers, provoked a reply at Grindelwald—but only from an unwary lady. I quote it, however, as representing the reply which most Wesleyans would, I imagine, make. Her answer was that "meeting in class and taking the sacrament" constituted a man a member of the "Methodist Church." The answer to which is—of course—that attending the class-meeting (which is a purely *human* institution) cannot admit to the *Church* (which is a *Divine* institution), and that the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is a Divine ordinance, cannot have any bearing on membership in a particular denomination. It is an ordinance of *the Church*, not of any "*Methodist Church*."

<sup>2</sup> "We regret that Mr. Batt should add anything about orders. He says, 'Nonconformists claim that their orders are valid.' In our innocence we had supposed that Nonconformists recognized no such thing as orders" (*The Nonconformist and Independent*, Jan. 26, 1888).

other as any proof whatsoever of a lawful appointment—such appointment as the deacons and presbyters of the New Testament had. We allow that men are ministers, and very worthy ministers, of the Baptist or Wesleyan denomination; what we hesitate to allow, without further proof, is that they are at the same time bishops, priests, or deacons of the one Church of God. It is no question, I may say in passing, of mere episcopal appointment; if we allow the validity of Presbyterian ordination it will not help them;<sup>1</sup> it is a question whether they are in the Christian succession, just as Wesleyan ministers must be in the Wesleyan succession. And I say it is to do us and themselves an injustice to decline to consider these points at all. We are in the same boat with them—the Romanist denies our orders as we deny theirs. But we do not resent his doing so, nor do we decline to discuss the question; we are constantly discussing it; we are doing it at this moment. We ask our Nonconformist brethren, therefore, not to destroy all hope of reconciliation by persisting in this mistake.

IV. Another mistake is that Nonconformists maintain a separation from us when the reasons for which they separated no longer exist, and when it taxes all their ingenuity to assign any adequate reason for not rejoining

<sup>1</sup> I say that if we allow Presbyterian orders, it will not be of much benefit to Dissenting ministers because, with the possible exception of the Presbyterians, they have not even Presbyterian orders. Most of them have no orders whatsoever. Many of them have declined to submit to the laying on of hands; they have insisted on shaking hands instead! Among the Wesleyans, the laying on of hands in ordination has indeed been revived, but those who began it had, with one solitary exception, received no sort of ordination themselves.

us. I say, in the first place, that they have not the reasons for separation (assuming that separation is ever lawful) which their fathers had. The Brownists, for example, had an excellent reason for leaving the Church, namely this, that it was not a true Church, and that its ministry was anti-christian.<sup>1</sup> But their present-day representatives, on the other hand, allow that it is a Church and its ministry lawful, and yet they hold aloof from it—hold aloof when they have thus cut the ground from under their feet! So, at a later date, when the Independents had discovered that it was a Church, “though not so pure a Church as some others,” they could still allege reasons for their attitude which cannot be put forward now. They objected to the surplice, to kneeling at the Lord’s Supper, to architecture, to organs, to stained glass, to fixed forms of prayer, to Confirmation, to frequent Communion, to the observance of Lent, of Christmas Day, of Good Friday, and so forth. But many Dissenters object to these things no longer; on the contrary, some of them eagerly adopt them; they allow that the Church was right on these points, and reproach their forefathers with groundless prejudices. And other matters, on which they retain their opinions—such, for example, as lessons taken from the Apocrypha, the exclusion of parents from being god-parents to their own children, pluralities, non-residence, the traffic in advowsons—these have either been removed by the Church or remedied by public opinion. The fathers could allege, again, that the Church was asleep, that the clergy did not preach the Gospel, and so forth, but their descendants cannot and do not say so now. They allow

<sup>1</sup> See note on p. 9.



that there has been an unexampled revival of religion amongst us,<sup>1</sup> and "the last charge," says Dr. Dunckley, "that any one would think of bringing against the Church is that it does not preach the Gospel." Yet they stand aloof as resolutely as ever; and if any Dissenter should by chance join us, he does it amid a loud chorus of lamentations and sometimes of cruel imputations. And if we ask what there is so very wicked in the Church, all they can mention is that we hold that infants are regenerated in baptism—some of them freely allow that believing adults are—and that we are guilty of sacerdotalism. But the mention of that word leads me to speak of another mistake.

V. I suppose no accusation is so frequently brought against the Church as that of sacerdotalism. I question if the Congregational or Baptist Union, or the Wesleyan Conference ever meets without copious philippics on the growth of "priestcraft" or "priestly assumptions" amongst us, and they assign this as a reason for "war to the knife." Well, they do right to resist us if they honestly think we are wrong, but they do us and themselves an injustice if they fling at us this charge, so damaging in the eyes of an uninstructed public, without first being clear that we are guilty of the things whereof they accuse us. And they are not clear; they cannot define this sacerdotalism; if they can, I ask them to do it now. The definitions they would give, if they stooped to give any, are such as we should eagerly repudiate. Some of them are definitions which would fit Dissenting

<sup>1</sup> "A more wonderful change than that in the English Church during the last quarter of a century can hardly be found in ecclesiastical history" (Dr. Bradford, *Guardian*, Nov. 28, 1894).

ministers more than ours. If it is said, for example, that sacerdotalism means that the priest claims to come between the soul and God, then we reply at once that the chapel minister comes between the soul and God no less than the Church's priest. His sermons do it even more than our sacraments. If you say that our priests come between the sinner and the Saviour, so as to hide the latter from view, we reply that this *cannot* be done in the services of the Church, and it may be done, and is done, in the ministrations of the chapel. No, Nonconformist orators have never troubled to find out, and to say clearly, what our heinous sacerdotalism consists in, and they owe it to us to do so before they make the charge. At present all they do is to give the Church dog a bad name, hoping that the public will presently hang it. I appeal to those who bring these charges to deal more fairly by us in this particular. In the name of our sacred religion, in the name of Him Whose disciples we desire to be, I implore them to make it clear what it is we are guilty of. There are indiscreet men amongst us,<sup>1</sup> no doubt, as there are elsewhere, and if they have made arrogant and unscriptural claims, we will do our best to bring them to a better mind. All we ask meanwhile is that our separated brethren should not call us names; that they should not trade on public prejudice; that they should not injure religion by striking a left-handed blow at some of its ministers.

VI. And the same remark applies to another charge

<sup>1</sup> One mistake of Nonconformists is that they constantly confound the whole Church in the censure they should reserve for a handful of extreme men. For the extreme men—in any direction—are but an insignificant fraction of the whole body of the clergy.

which, I observe, a certain class of Nonconformists is never weary of repeating, the charge of persecution on our part, of making proselytes by unworthy means. I respectfully submit that it is entirely unworthy of any Christian to make accusations of this kind without producing a shadow of proof, and I think it will be admitted that the proof never is produced. Yet why should it not be—*if it exists*? If this is done, it is so mean and so disgraceful that every good man will join with you in reprobating it. Churchmen are not so lost to all decency and propriety as is sometimes supposed. One thing I can safely say, that they loathe such methods of advancing the Church as much as Dissenters can do, and if they do not join with Dissenters in decrying them, it is only because they do not believe that they exist. In fact, Churchmen, both in Cornwall and in Wales, declare that the boot is on the other leg. But, whether it is or not, we will not bring any such railing accusation against Nonconformists, without at the same time putting it into their power to disprove it.

VII. I now come to my last point, the last *mistake* of which I shall treat. I submit to candid and thoughtful Nonconformists that it is a mistake on their part to join in the cry for Disendowment. About Disestablishment, I say nothing now. What is called "Establishment" is so shadowy a thing—so very shadowy—that if it were carried out, as it may be, men would hardly know the difference. No, Disendowment is what is really aimed at. "Disendowment," says the *British Weekly*, "is the great matter for which we are fighting. By its side, Disestablishment is the merest trifle." I therefore venture, believing that they are open to conviction on this

as on other points, to ask whether they are well-advised in demanding (such as do demand it) that the Church should be deprived of its possessions. I shall only deal with one point, but I think that it is the main point. This money, whensoever and by whomsoever it was given, was given to God, was set apart for the services of religion. Is religion such a bad thing; is even religion as the Church professes and preaches it, such a bad thing that Christians do well to insist that this money must be taken away from it? Can they really be serving Christ when they want to secularise, to devote to baths and wash-houses and similar purposes—perhaps to restoring evicted Irishmen—the modest endowments which the Church still possesses? Is it that they find money such a bad thing themselves? Is it that we have too much of it and should be better off without it? If the Church were a mere social or philanthropic institution Christians would never think of despoiling it. Is the fact that it is concerned with religion, and that its religion is in competition with other forms of Christianity, a reason for taking away moneys given to religion and applying them to (so-called) national purposes? I only ask the question, and I ask it because I think it worthy of calm consideration. I ask it because I fear lest, if they should succeed in their endeavour, the day may come when they will bitterly regret having taken the things of God and given them to Cæsar; when they may wish that Christ's religion, in any form, had these resources for the struggle that lies before it.

## PART II.

### THE MISCONCEPTIONS OF NONCONFORMISTS AS TO CHURCH ORDER.

IN describing, as I have done so far, the "mistakes" of Nonconformists, I have had in my mind the practical blunders which (as I conceive) they have made, or are now making, in the attitude which they have assumed towards the Church. It is of their *action* that I have treated, rather than of their *views* and *beliefs*. But as they may and will reply that their action has been and is the outcome, and the only logical outcome, of their beliefs, I hope it may make for peace and charity, if in this second part of the book I deal briefly with *some* of the erroneous opinions, the misconceptions—the popular and prevailing misconceptions—which have betrayed them into their present position, and which now lead them to think that Dissent is an imperative Christian duty.

Nor can I flatter myself that this is a needless task, just because I happen to have already treated, more or less fully, of *some* of these same misconceptions elsewhere. Nothing dies harder than error, and especially doctrinal error, and, most of all, error around which a prodigious number of "vested interests" and societies



and institutions have gradually collected. The man who thinks that any one book, or for the matter of that, any score of books, be their arguments ever so cogent, have given the *coup de grace*, once and for all, to this or that misbelief, only deceives himself; he will presently find that this and all heresy is hydra-headed, and that, if it has been effectually disposed of here, it is only that it may crop up with renewed vigour and pertinacity elsewhere. I may, perhaps, be allowed to say that we had a conspicuous instance of this at Grindelwald. Charges were copiously brought against the Church, against its doctrines, its offices, its connection with the State, etc., with many of which I had myself dealt, and (as I believed, and still believe) dealt conclusively, in *Church or Chapel?* or at Lucerne, in 1893. Still they were resolutely repeated, just as if they had never been answered by anybody. For it was not that those who made these charges were not at all convinced by the arguments which I and others had advanced; it was that they had never so much as seen or heard of them. Nor do I know that this is very much to be wondered at, because it is notorious that even earnest Christian men, who are supposed to be ardent seekers after the truth, whithersoever it may lead them, only read, with rare exceptions, books and papers which are of their own way of thinking. And the consequence is that we are compelled—compelled by their very repetition of the charge—to go on repeating our defence or our explanation, whenever the opportunity presents itself. It is for this reason that I have no hesitation in referring, even for the third or fourth time, to certain prominent Non-conformist misstatements—misstatements conscientiously

made, no doubt, but still no nearer the truth for that reason. It may be that some hundreds of persons will read these pages who have read no other reply.

I shall not feel it necessary, however, I need hardly say, in any case where the error—or what I conceive to be such—has been adequately discussed elsewhere, to go over the whole ground again. That would be wearisome indeed. I shall in that case dismiss it with a very summary treatment, referring the reader for further information to chapters where the subject is considered in all its bearings. And now, after this explanation, let us turn to these common Nonconformist misconceptions. And first—

I. *It is an entire misconception on their part to think that Scripture tells of any "invisible Church."* Nothing is more widely believed amongst them, but nothing is accepted with less of reason and inquiry. And here I am happy to be able to quote one of their own ablest writers. "The word 'church,'" says Dr. Fairbairn,<sup>1</sup> "always denotes *an organised society*." But this error is much too deeply seated to be dislodged by any one man's *ipse dixit*. Nothing but a careful study of the New Testament will convince men that, not merely is there no mention in its pages of any invisible Church—if there is, perhaps they will kindly say *where it is to be found*—but that the word is used in a way which leaves us no option but to think of a visible society, of the band or community of Christ's professed followers. It is a widespread error, and one by no means confined to Nonconformists, that the word "church," as it appears in the Bible, is used in two entirely different and indeed

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in the Life of Christ*, p. 108, note.



contradictory senses, now of a visible community, and now of the unseen and unrecognizable company of all pious souls. There are many Churchmen who persist in interpreting it thus, but they cannot produce a vestige of a reason for so doing. For it is no reason whatsoever to say that there is within the visible Church an invisible company of true Christians, known to God alone, who constitute its soul and kernel; that is quite true, and we recognize it as fully as they do, but it does not follow that this company is ever called a "Church" or regarded as in any sense constituting a Church. It is not so called or so regarded. The name is given only to a visible community, or the visible community of baptized Christians.<sup>1</sup> The very word "church" implies visibility and organization. This is the first and perhaps the most fruitful of Nonconformist misbeliefs. It colours and distorts all their ideas about the Church of God. Similarly—

II. *It is an entire misconception that the Churches of the New Testament were composed of devout Christians only.* It is a misconception to think that none were admitted to membership therein (as none, so far as they can ensure it, are now admitted into Dissenting communions) who could not "make a profession of having undergone a spiritual change." No such profession was required. No one was expected "to narrate the story of his awaking to religious consciousness." They did undoubtedly profess their belief in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, into Whose name they were to be baptized; but they did not profess any faith in *themselves*, that is to

<sup>1</sup> A full discussion of this question will be found in *The Christian Church—What is it?* (Mowbray.) See especially chap. xv.

say, in their conversion or acceptance, or make any statement as to their religious "experiences" or attainments. And for the good reason that men were baptized first and taught afterwards, as our Lord Himself appointed (St. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). St. Paul was, Lydia was, the eunuch was, the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius were. Any one who reads these narratives will see that there had been no time to instruct these neophytes before baptism. Not only so, he will soon find out that the Churches of that age were no better than the Churches of this. The Church of Sardis, to quote but one example, was "dead." Yes, these congregations, like the whole community of Christians, consisted of wheat and tares, of good fish and bad, of fruitful and unfruitful branches. To say that the Church's field must have no tares, the Church's net no bad fish, the Living Vine no dead or dying branches, is to contradict our Holy Lord. The Church was meant to be a SCHOOL, a place for making bad men better, and to regard it as a SHOWROOM is a fatal blunder. Christ ordained that it should consist of "disciples," that is to say, of *learners*; we are now told that it must be made up of "professors"!<sup>1</sup> Our answer is, that "from the beginning it was not so."

III. *Another error*—it can be demonstrated to be an error from Holy Scripture—is to regard the Church as "*an institution of man*." It is true that Dissenters are by no means agreed on this point, and we may be thankful that it is so. For whilst Dr. Fairbairn, for example, asserts that "the Church is not an inspiration

<sup>1</sup> Much more will be found on this subject in *The Christian Church*, chaps. xvii., xxiv.

of God, but an institution of man," Dr. Mackennal is equally clear that "the Church is a Divine institution." Of course it is: Scripture leaves us in no manner of doubt on that point. Though made up of men; though its members are admitted and its officers are appointed by human agency, still, its "builder and maker is God." If it is a human institution, how comes it to pass that it is called "the Church of God"? How comes it to pass that Christ builds it (St. Matt. xvi. 18), and that its several parts or congregations are called "the Churches of God"? No, if anything is certain about the Church—and the *visible* Church—it is that it is God's Church.<sup>1</sup> No man or number of men can, therefore, found a "Church" or recast the old Church. But it also follows from this, among other things—

IV. *That it is a fatal misbelief to hold that there can be rival or competitive Churches.* If God founded the Church, then He cannot also be the founder of secession "Churches." He cannot "be divided against Himself;" cannot be the author of strife and confusion. And hence it is that in Holy Writ we everywhere read of *one* Church and no more. There is no trace, not the least, of any second or separatist "Church." Men could not found them: in those days they did not attempt to found them; it is only of late years that we hear of a "Baptist Church" or a "Methodist Church." There can be no Church but *the* Church.<sup>2</sup> We may allow, what some Dissenters contend for—though I cannot admit that they have so far given us any convincing proof of it—that there were considerable differences of organization and structure in the early Churches, but that is an

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Church*, chap. xviii.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* chap. xx.

entirely different thing<sup>1</sup> from what it is alleged to justify, namely, the existence of man-made Churches which owe their origin to a separation from *the* Church, which took their rise and are maintained in being because of a firm repudiation of the authority and orders and institutions of the original body. Differences of administration in the "one body" are one thing: a brand new Wesleyan body or a Countess of Huntingdon's Church is quite another. But another misunderstanding is—

V. *That the Church of England is herself a split from the Church of Rome.* It is almost invariably retorted upon Churchmen, when they protest against these interminable secessions, that they themselves live in glass-houses and therefore should not throw stones. "What is the English Church," it is asked, "but a separatist body? It was once (so they say) a part of the Church of Rome, and at the Reformation it separated from it." Yes, and Dissenters go on saying this, though (as has been repeatedly shown) not a scrap of evidence has been produced, or can be, to show *when or where or by whom* this alleged separation was made. There has been no such separation. At the Reformation the English Church did undoubtedly renounce the usurped authority of the

<sup>1</sup> It was contended at Grindelwald that there were differences of opinion and of organization in the early Church distinctly greater than any which exist between Churchmen and Dissenters at the present time. But if this is the case, it is a condemnation, not a justification of Dissent. For it is not pretended that, whatever their differences, the early Christians *separated* because of these differences. There was no breaking away from *the* Church. And if it be contended, as it is by Congregationalists, that there was then no Church other than the congregation, then we say that there was no breaking away from the congregation, no setting up of rival congregations as "Churches."

pope : it did contend, as it does still, that the bishop of Rome has no more right to coerce and order the Church of this land, not to speak of fleecing it, than any other foreign prelate ; it did reject his iron sway, and with it rejected some errors and accretions which had crept into it,—but it did no more, and those who say that it seceded cannot point to any single Act of Parliament or of Convocation, or to any authoritative instrument of any kind, which effected, or even contemplated, a separation from the ancient historic body. If the pope is, as he claims to be, the vicar of Christ and head of the Church on earth, no doubt our fathers did cut themselves loose from his lawful jurisdiction, but then Dissenters do not believe, any more than we do, that he is either the one or the other. No ; there has been no separation, no secession. The Romanists went out from us, but we did not withdraw from them. It is one thing to beg a foreign bishop to mind his own business and not interfere in our concerns ; it is quite another to set up a rival society,<sup>1</sup> or to quarrel with the existing society. The

<sup>1</sup> This objection is considered at length in *English Nonconformity and Christ's Christianity*, chap. iv. I may add that Nonconformists constantly fall back on the Romanists for an argument against the Church, somewhat to our surprise. If, for example, we question Dissenting "orders" or say that their communions are not true "Churches," we are sure to be reminded that Cardinal Vaughan, or some one else, denies *our* orders and says that the English Church is not a branch of the Catholic Church. This is, perhaps, natural, under the circumstances, but all the same it is futile and absurd : absurd for this reason—that *Dissenters do not attach any value whatsoever to his opinion on other points*, as, for example, on *their* "orders," or *their status* as a Church. He disallows all their claims, and they forthwith say he is altogether wrong. They will not take his verdict with regard to themselves—no, not for an hour



next misconception to be noticed—and a sturdy one it is—is this—

VI. *That the Church of England is a "State Church," whilst the Nonconformist bodies are "free" from State control.* That the English Church is under State control is not for a moment denied; we do emphatically deny that it is "bound hand and foot" by the State, as Dissenters are so fond of saying. At any rate we can preach the Word and minister the Sacraments of Christ, and do good to the utmost of our powers in our parishes, without any State interference, and I do not know that Nonconformists can do much more. All the same, we are, to a certain extent, under "State control." *But so are all Dissenting bodies.* They are recognized as we are: their affairs are regulated as ours are. They can no more alter their standards or Trust Deeds without recourse to the tribunal of law than we can, and many of them know it by painful experience.<sup>1</sup> Wherever there is a legal instrument—and many chapels have their poll deeds or trusts or confessions of faith—and wherever there are vested interests, there the State exercises its control, and the chapel can no more escape it than the Church can. The so-called (and I may add, self-styled)

—they trample on it; and yet they eagerly fasten on every word that this same fallible person says against the Church and flaunt it in our face. But why should *we* "regard vain words" when they do not?

<sup>1</sup> The Church was reproached at Grindelwald with being unable to alter its Prayer-book in any particular without an Act of Parliament. And yet at this moment the Wesleyans are contemplating an application to Parliament to modify their *Deed of Declaration*, and even the Presbyterians in the United States talk of having recourse to the tribunals to modify their *Creed*.



"Free Churches" are the subjects of legislation, as the Church is; they are amenable to the courts of law, as the Church is—so much so that Lord Mansfield declared that "the Dissenters' way of worship is established," and Speaker Onslow pronounced that "the Dissenters are as truly established as the Church of England." Yes, we are all under State control. But that does not make *us* a "State Church," any more than it makes them "State Churches." We were neither founded nor endowed, nor are we supported by the State, nor are our members or ministers, our rites or ordinances, our creeds and confessions, appointed by it, and Dissenters only deceive themselves and others when they talk as if they were. I repeat, if we form a State Church because we are not "free," then so do they. If they are not State Churches because of State control, no more are we.<sup>1</sup> But I pass on to notice a kindred misconception, namely—

VII. *That the present relations of the Church of England to the State are irreligious or unscriptural.* Much is said by Dissenters upon this subject—I might say that much inflammatory language is used—but no *proof* is given. No one can put his finger on this or that particular in these relations and show that *this* is distinctly against the law of Christ. They object, for example, to the nomination of bishops for certain sees, or of clergy for certain cures, by the Prime Minister or the Lord Chancellor. But they never tell us why, if these men,

<sup>1</sup> Much information on this point will be found in a little treatise, *How Dissent is Established and Endowed*, by G. H. F. Nye, and in Lord Selborne's tract, *The Endowments and Establishment of the Church of England*, as, of course, in his larger works.

who, according to St. Paul, are all the "ministers of God," are fit to govern a Christian country, they are, nevertheless, unfit to *select* a clergyman (which is all that they can do; they cannot *make* any man a clergyman, or *prescribe* what he shall do or say) for a post in Christ's Church. One would naturally suppose that the ruler of a land like this might at least be as well qualified for such a task as, say, a Deacon Tozer and a Farmer Jobson—I mean no disrespect to deacons and farmers. And so with other particulars. They object, to take one further example, to tithes, to "compulsory payments," as they call them, "for religion." Our answer is that there is no compulsion about it. No one was compelled to buy this or that parcel of land (which land had been charged from time immemorial with the payment of tithe), or, if they *inherited* the land, no one compels them to keep it. If they object on principle to pay tithes, they can part with the land (which they bought or inherited subject to tithe), and then somebody else will pay them. But one thing they cannot do; one thing we say it is unfair and dishonest to do—to keep the land, which they or their fathers got *for so much less because of the tithe*, and yet refuse to discharge the obligations and bear the burdens which they undertook when they bought it. The only "compulsion," therefore, of which they can complain is that they are required to carry out a contract into which they or their predecessors entered with their eyes open.<sup>1</sup> To whatever purpose the tithes are appropriated, the payers are

<sup>1</sup> The question of tithes is considered at large in *Church or Chapel?* ch. l.; that of the "Establishment" (so-called) in chaps. xlviii. and xlix.

under covenant to pay them, and tithes are appropriated to the support and extension of one form of Christ's religion, for Church Christianity is still (whatever its defects in Nonconformist eyes) a form of Christianity. Another common mistake of Nonconformists is—

VIII. *That they have not religious equality with the Church.* They take good care to tell us, and that frequently, that they do not enjoy it, but they find it difficult to say in what the inequality consists. It is not (1) that they are excluded from the Church. If they are outside it, it is by their own act and deed. The State does not exclude them; it regards every baptized person as a Church member. Whatever privileges may belong to membership, they are free to share them. Nor is it (2) that they are not free to leave the Church, for they have left it, and have started "Churches" of their own, and no one hinders their so doing. Perhaps it is that they are not free to leave the Church and yet claim a *full* share in its privileges. I say a "full share," for it is a singular fact, and one which suggests that it is Churchmen who really have to complain of "religious inequality," that though Dissenters have withdrawn from the Church, they can still claim a part in its arrangements. They can vote in the election of churchwardens, for example; they can even serve, and often do serve, as churchwardens themselves, and so have a voice in the distribution of Church moneys, whether they have contributed towards them or not. They can vote, again, in the election of an incumbent, if the patronage of their parish church, as sometimes happens, is in the hands of the parishioners; they can appoint the incumbent, if they happen to be patrons of the living. So that they

actually have privileges which the steadfast Churchman has not. They have a voice, that is to say, in his church, and they have also a voice in their own chapel. And if any other Church privilege is denied them, is that a hardship? Can they reasonably expect to have their pudding and to eat it too? to renounce the Church and all its obligations, and yet enjoy all its benefits? But perhaps I shall be told (3) that the presence of the bishops in the House of Lords constitutes an inequality. I answer that it is counterbalanced by the fact that Dissenting ministers can sit in the House of Commons, whilst the clergy cannot.<sup>1</sup> Still, it will be urged (4) that the Church has a certain *prestige* and place which the chapel has not. But, if this is so, and I am not concerned to deny it, I reply that this is no longer, as it may once have been, because of its connection with the State; it is because of its antiquity, its traditions, its learning, or the ideas—the absurd ideas, if you will—of society. And here is the proof. The Romanists have a *prestige* which the chapel has not, yet they are not “established.” The Church in Wales, again, is established, but there the place and pre-eminence belong to the chapel, not the Church; there the Churchman, if not treated as a leper, is often contemned and reproached, as if he belonged to an inferior order of beings, as, indeed, he also is in many Cornish parishes. The Episcopal Church in America, again, is not established, but all the same, it takes rank, as do the

<sup>1</sup> I think Dissenters have a grievance in the matter of the registration of their marriages, and I earnestly desire to see that and every similar inequality remedied. But it is not necessary to burn down a house in order to enjoy roast pig.

Romanists, in spite of their large Irish element, above Methodists and Presbyterians. The inequality, therefore, is *social, not political*; it is a matter of (supposed) comparative "church" respectability, and this no amount of legislation will alter. It is a common complaint amongst Dissenting ministers that they are *ostracized*—I use the word which they have used to me—that, whatever their gifts or culture may be, they are not received by society as clergymen or even as Romish priests are. No doubt this is so; but I submit that the Church is not to blame for this, and I say that it is a mistake and an injustice to lay it at the Church's door. It is *society*, with its rules and usages, not the Church, with its principles and laws, that is responsible for their exclusion from dinners and drawing-rooms. But let us now pass to another point.

IX. It is a constant misconception amongst Nonconformists that they have a grievance *in the exclusion of their ministers from the pulpits of our churches*. Dr. Joseph Parker is not the only preacher who is eloquent on this subject; many Nonconformist ministers regard it as an injustice, or at least a hardship.<sup>1</sup> But to us it is an unmixed surprise that any Dissenter should for one moment expect it. For this is how matters stand. They have left the Church, as they hasten to assure us, for reasons of conscience; they have renounced its fellowship because they disagreed with one or other of its doctrines or usages.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, their *views* were

<sup>1</sup> This Dissenting disability was repeatedly referred to both at Lucerne and Grindelwald.

<sup>2</sup> "That adherence to the National Church was a sin was the position taken up by Robert Brown and others" (Dr. Mackennal).

such that they could not conscientiously be *members* of it, and now, forsooth, they incontinently claim to act as *ministers* in it. They could not endure to worship with us any longer, just because they thought so very differently from what we do, and yet they actually expect to be accepted as our teachers and instructors. One day they say openly that the Church's ideas of Christianity are not theirs, and the next they claim to air their ideas of Christianity in the Church's pulpits. They never think of admitting Romanists or Unitarians to their "rostrums," and yet we are to admit those who pronounce us altogether in the wrong to ours. To us all this appears to be the height of inconsistency, not to say of audacity. This is worse than wanting to "have your pudding and to eat it;" it is wanting to keep your own pudding and to eat somebody else's.

X. Nor can we think that Nonconformists are well advised in boasting of their freedom to *invite whomsoever they will to preach in their chapels*, whilst we are restricted to such ministers as have *received episcopal ordination*. No doubt this rule does deprive us of some addresses by which we could not fail to profit; still, we say that the rule is sound and safe, and the only safe one. And for this reason, that most Churchmen, and, indeed, most Christians, are persuaded, as *all* Christians were for fifteen centuries,<sup>1</sup> that only those clergymen who have been sent by superior authority—that is to say, ordained

<sup>1</sup> It was urged at Grindelwald that we want Dissenters "to give up the whole Christian world, in order to unite with us." On the contrary, we want them, on this point, to *come into line* with nearly the whole Christian world, for the Christians who insist on Episcopal regimen even now far outnumber those who have surrendered or lost it.



by bishops—are lawfully called and sent.<sup>1</sup> Most Churchmen, rightly or wrongly, believe that Dissenting ministers, however able they may be, are not true ministers of Christ, not merely because they have not had *episcopal* ordination, but because some of them have had *no* ordination—some say there is no such thing. We may regret that such should be their views, but such *are* their views. Why, then, should we sow discord amongst them by inviting men to minister to them in holy things who, they say, are *not* ministers? Why invite men whom our congregations do not recognize, and who, moreover, do not teach what our congregations hold and believe? Is this the way to promote peace and edification? In fact, the freedom of which Dissenters boast comes to this, that they can ask men whom they and their congregations consider to be *qualified* to preach, and we can do the same. If they are also free to invite unqualified men, we do not envy them their freedom. Such freedom on the part of the minister means slavery on the part of the congregation. I now proceed to say—

XI. *That Nonconformists entirely misconceive*—or somehow constantly misrepresent—*the Church's doctrine as to the ministry*. They constantly hold the doctrine of apostolical succession up to ridicule, or they dismiss it with a sneer, as a fable, or a “fond thing vainly invented,” whereas it is the *very principle to which they adhere*—and *must* adhere—in their own denominations. Neither Wesleyans nor Presbyterians recognize a man as one of

<sup>1</sup> “We require you to find out but one Church on the face of the whole earth that . . . hath not been ordered . . . by Episcopal regimen sithence the time that the blessed apostles were here conversant” (Hooker).

their ministers on the strength of his *qualifications*—his abilities or his piety; they only recognize those who have been appointed such by Wesleyan or Presbyterian ministers; that is to say, they uphold a modern *ministerial* succession: it is only a succession which goes back *to the apostles* that they resent. They insist on a succession, they are compelled so to do, at the very time that they are taunting us with giving heed to fables and endless genealogies. The only difference is a difference of date; we begin with the apostles, they begin, or the Wesleyans do, with the year 1836. (I may mention here that some Presbyterians, the late well-known Dr. Cumming, for example, have held the doctrine of Apostolic Succession—that is to say, that Christ's ministers can only be appointed and set apart by Christ's ministers in lineal succession from the Apostles, just as we do.<sup>1</sup>) I therefore submit to them that they are in fairness bound to show why our doctrine is so very foolish or so formal, when all the time they rigorously maintain a succession of their own, which, *in principle*, is the counterpart of ours.

XII. Another common error, and one closely allied to that just considered, is that *the good work done by Dissenting communions proves those communions to be Churches of God*. Sometimes it takes the form of comparing the numbers of Anglicans with the numbers of Baptists or Methodists, very much to the disparagement of the former, as if forsooth questions of truth and falsehood could be settled by counting noses.<sup>2</sup> It used

<sup>1</sup> See his *Apology for the Church of Scotland*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>2</sup> "When sect strives with sect, and they would decide the superiority by counting heads, they are both in a way to fall down and worship the spirit of the world" (*British Weekly*, February 22, 1894).

to be believed, moreover, that the way of error was a broad one, whilst truth lay at the bottom of a well, and few there were that found it. But more frequently the error takes the shape of building ecclesiastical claims on the spiritual *good* that has been accomplished by Dissenters. The Bishop of Worcester, for example—and I only name him as the most eminent representative of the class—feels unable to deny to the Wesleyans the name of “church,” when he remembers the labours of their missionaries in Fiji, or to the Congregationalists when he thinks of their translations of the Scriptures; and his decision is very widely accepted as robust common sense. But the objection has never been answered that if the Wesleyan missions in Fiji prove the Wesleyan *body* to be a Church, then how much more the Missionary *Society*, by whom, indeed, these missions were organized and supported, and that, if translations of the Scriptures are evidences of a true Church organization, then the Bible Society must stand at the head of all Churches. It has never been explained how, on these principles, the “Church Army” is *not* a Church, and the Church of Sardis *was* a Church, nor can it be.<sup>1</sup>

XIII. A word must be bestowed on the allegation, so constantly made, that *Dissenters have been thrust out of the Church*. It has been contradicted again and again,<sup>2</sup> but error, as already observed, dies very hard,<sup>3</sup> so that it may be as well to refer to it once more. No Dissenter has been put out of the Church’s communion. The ministers excluded in 1662 were ejected from their *cures*, their

<sup>1</sup> See *Church or Chapel?* chap. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> This common error reappeared at Grindelwald.

*benefices*, but they were not thereby, directly or indirectly, put out of membership. Nothing but a *sentence* of excommunication can put men out of the synagogue, and excommunication only puts out of *benefits*, not out of the *body*. But I shall be told that, by the canons of 1604, Dissenters who say that Churchmen are profane, etc., are *ipso facto* excommunicated. I answer, No. What the canons say is that such impugnors of the Church *are to be* excommunicated—"let him be excommunicated *ipso facto*, and not restored but only by the archbishop," etc. But excommunication is not, any more than "restoration," a secret spiritual or subjective process; it is an act of a *tribunal*; it involves a trial and a sentence. It may be that some Dissenters *should be* "excommunicated *ipso facto*"—on that I pronounce no opinion—but until they *have* been, no one can say that they are thrust out of the Church.

### PART III.

#### THE MISCONCEPTIONS OF NONCONFORMISTS AS TO CHURCH TEACHING.

BUT I must now turn to a different class of misconceptions. Those which we have so far considered relate, for the most part, to the nature and office of the Church and the appointment of its ministers; those with which I am now to deal concern the doctrines and ordinances of the Church of England. I can only notice, however, some few of these,<sup>1</sup> namely, those which were urged in the course of the Grindelwald debates, which received little or no consideration at the time, and of which I have not treated sufficiently elsewhere. I shall take them, as far as may be, in the order of their relative importance. And I begin with—

I. *The misconception of Nonconformists as to the formula used in the ordination of bishops and priests.* They take grave exception, as everybody familiar with these questions is well aware, to the words, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain, they

<sup>1</sup> I have considered others at length in *Church or Chapel?*

are retained." To them it appears to border on blasphemy, that any one man should say to another, "Receive the Holy Ghost," and "whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven."<sup>1</sup> Let us see, then, how the matter stands. You will find, I think, that what we are accused of is neither more nor less than this, that *we take God at His word*. But, first, let us try to put ourselves for a moment into the place of Nonconformists, and see what it is that offends them. I believe I am correct in saying that it is this—that the bishop seems to them to claim the power of giving *ex mero motu* the Holy Ghost. They say that Christ could, and did, bestow the Holy Spirit, and that the bishop neither can nor does, and yet that he pretends to give it. It seems to them that he, being a man, arrogates to himself the powers of God.<sup>2</sup>

And they point out, quite truly, that he uses in ordination the exact words which Christ our Lord used in commissioning the apostles—the bishop, that is to say, takes Christ's formula of ordination and makes it his own. They say, and they say truly, that words which were appropriate enough on our Saviour's lips, may nevertheless be blasphemous on ours. And that, they add, is the case with these words. To this we reply—

<sup>1</sup> It was said at Grindelwald that this formula by itself was a sufficient reason why no Nonconformist minister should ever seek ordination in the Church.

<sup>2</sup> One would have thought that such a charge as this would have carried with it its own refutation. What must Dissenters think that our bishops are made of, that they suppose them to be capable of such absurd and wicked pretensions? They readily acknowledge their learning and piety—it was a Presbyterian who said that nowhere will you find forty such scholars, such gentlemen, and such Christians as the occupants of the episcopal bench, and yet they think them capable of downright blasphemy!



(1) That though the bishop employs the *ipsissima verba* of our Lord, it by no means follows that he uses them in the same way or in the same sense. It is obvious enough that we may use Christ's words *as Christ's*; as conveying His message and not ours. In fact, we *cannot* use His words precisely as He used them. They must always have a lower and narrower meaning on our lips than they had on His. He spake as one that had authority and not as the scribes. We can only speak as the scribes, and not as having authority. He spake as God; we speak as men.

(2) It hardly seems like Christian charity to put a sinister, and more, a blasphemous, interpretation on the words of a minister of Christ who is solemnly and prayerfully ordaining ministers of Christ, if those words are patient of an innocent and common-sense meaning. And least of all is it charitable to do this when the innocent interpretation is the natural and straightforward one. But these are mere preliminaries. Now I proceed to ask —

1. *Is it true, or is it not, that Almighty God gives the Holy Spirit to those who sincerely ask Him?* Yes, or No? Of course there is only one answer to that question. Dissenters can only give one answer, and that is "Yes." It *is* the case that God freely gives the Holy Ghost in answer to fervent prayer. If Scripture is to be trusted, and if Christ our Lord has not deceived us (St. Luke xi. 13), the answer must be in the affirmative.

Indeed, I might point out here—though it is not necessary to the argument—that God Who is rich in mercy and is always more ready to give than we are to receive, imparts this same Blessed Spirit to some who do *not* ask;

to many who neither desire nor deserve it. It must be so. Without God's prevenient grace we are not likely to want His grace at all. And I might also remind the reader (1) how the Holy Spirit is *the* gift of gifts, "*the* promise of the Father," the gift which comprehends within itself all "good things."<sup>1</sup> I might remind him again (2) that our Lord has, so to speak, *provoked* us to pray for this gracious presence—for the Holy Ghost is God, and it is because He is God that this must be the best of gifts and the source of all good—"If ye being evil," He has said, "know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more* shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" I might show (3) how not only is "the manifestation of the Spirit given to every man to *profit* withal" (1 Cor. xii. 7), but is given to each man according to his *need* (Phil. iv. 19). And I might justly remark (4) that the Holy Ghost thus freely given to the *members* of Christ's body, and given according to their place in the body (1 Cor. xii. 8-22), must be and is given to the *ministers*, who indeed are the hand and the mouth amongst the members. I say "*must be given*" because, wherever God entails responsibility, He bestows at the same time grace to discharge it. It is inconceivable that He should commission any man to be His ambassador, and yet deny him the particular gifts necessary for his work. I say "*is given*," because it is the Holy Ghost that constitutes men Christ's ministers (St. John xx. 21; Acts xiii. 2, xx. 28),

<sup>1</sup> It is significant that the promise recorded in St. Matt. vii. 11, "How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give *good things* to them that ask him?" takes this shape in St. Luke xi. 13, "give *the Holy Spirit* to them that ask Him."

because it is the Holy Ghost who alone can equip them for their office (Acts i., iii., viii., x.; 1 Cor. xii. 7). I might also observe, lastly, that, by God's own ordering and appointment, the gift of the Spirit was connected, in apostolic times at least, with the laying on of hands; that it was not only given in answer to prayer, but through the use of this outward and visible means (Acts viii. 17, 18, xix. 6; 1 Tim. iv. 14; 2 Tim. i. 6). I might justly and reasonably press all these considerations on the reader's attention, and if I do not do so, if I pass them over with a bare mention, it is not because I do not regard them as weighty and influential, but only because my argument will stand very well without them. They may and do confirm it; they may and do buttress it up. But, then, it does not need any sort of buttressing up. It is quite enough for my purpose, if it is admitted that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who sincerely seek it. And this cannot be denied, or can only be denied by flatly contradicting our Saviour Christ (St. Luke xi. 13; St. John iv. 19, vii. 39).

Very good. Then I now proceed to ask a second question.

2. *Has prayer been offered on behalf of those about to be ordained, and especially prayer for the Holy Ghost?* And to this question, like the first, only one answer, and that an affirmative one, is possible. Prayer *has* been offered for the ordinands. The ordination has been preceded by a week of prayer, for an embertide collect has been said daily, and the ember days are days of abstinence and prayer. The service, again, has had its prayers, both public and private. The Litany has been said with its special suffrage on their behalf; there has

been a special collect; the bishop has exhorted them "to pray earnestly for *His Holy Spirit*;" has bidden them "continually to pray to God the Father, by the mediation of our only Saviour Jesus Christ, for the *heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost*;" and, finally, the *Veni Creator Spiritus*, a solemn invocation of the Spirit's aid, has been sung or said by bishop and ordinands. What more, we may ask, could have been done to supplicate the manifold gifts of the Holy Ghost—at least by men who do not believe that they will be heard for their much speaking? Well, something more *has* been done, but in the way of silence. The congregation has been appealed to, "secretly in their prayers, to make their humble supplication to God for all these things," and silence has been kept for a space to enable them to offer up these private petitions. No; only one answer is possible, and that is that prayer, earnest and importunate prayer, public and private prayer, solemn and successive prayers have been offered, and for the grace and benediction of God the Holy Ghost.

And the next thing is, the bishop says, "Receive the Holy Ghost." And pray why should he not say it? Yes, *why*, if we take God at His word; if we believe that He hears prayer; if we hold that He ever gives the Holy Ghost to seeking souls? The gift has been asked for; it is there, waiting to be received. Why should he not charge the ordinand to receive it? He who giveth to all men liberally stands with outstretched hands, yearning to bestow it; why should not the ordinand take it? What is there in the least degree superstitious, or formal, or unevangelical in the bishop's saying, as in effect he does say, "Take the Holy Ghost? Not from

us—man cannot bestow God. You would never dream that *we* pretended to give God's presence and power—no, but from 'your Father which is in heaven.' Take it, not because we merit it or you merit it, but because of Christ's merits, and because of His mission of the Spirit—you will remember our words to you a moment ago—'that you will continually pray to *God the Father*, by the mediation of our *only Saviour Jesus Christ*, for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost.' Receive it, not merely because we have asked and you have asked, and 'every one that asketh, receiveth' (St. Matt. vii. 8), but because you cannot be God's minister without it, and we believe and you believe that you are truly called 'to the order and ministry of the priesthood.'" Yes, the bishop has *additional* and substantial reasons for saying, "Receive the Holy Ghost." I have said that it is reason enough that the Holy Ghost has been prayed for, and that God gives it in answer to prayer, and we need allege no other reason than this; but all the same he *has* other reasons; he must have, if he takes God at His word. He has this reason, that this man kneeling before him is to be appointed to an office in God's Church, and that only the Holy Ghost can appoint him (Acts xx. 28), and that therefore the Holy Ghost will appoint him—or let us say, to meet a possible objection, will appoint him, if he will "take the Holy Ghost." And he has this reason, that, as he says the words, he uses at the same moment the outward and visible sign, the sign and seal of Divine appointment, the imposition of hands? Why should he doubt that, when he prayerfully and believingly uses the *means*, God will make it a means of *grace*? If he is deceived, he

may at any rate plead that the Bible has deceived him. If he is guilty of *any* error, it is of the error of believing that God is as gracious and as bountiful as ever He was; that men and ministers are as dependent on God's grace as ever they were; that the means of grace are as necessary and as efficacious as ever they were. You think, in your charity, that it is arrogance or superstition that prompts the bishop to say these words, or the ordinands to expect these gifts; we say, and we are sure, that it is simply taking God at His word; we say that if the Holy Ghost is not there for this man to receive, and to receive according to his need, according to his place in God's Church, then it must be that prayer for the Holy Ghost is not heard when it has the misfortune to be offered *in the Church*, or that God denies it to those who are so unhappy as to be set apart for the Church's ministry in the ancient and apostolic way.

The second part of the formula—"Whose sins thou dost forgive," etc.—I must dismiss with a few words, as I have already considered this question elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> It must suffice to say here that man can only forgive sins—the apostles could only forgive sins—in the sense of declaring and conveying God's forgiveness of sins, and that he can only proclaim pardon to those whom God in His secret counsel has already pardoned; that God can only pardon and absolve those who repent and believe, and, therefore, that the priest can only declare and pronounce and convey God's pardon and absolution to those who repent and believe—which assuredly is reasonable and evangelical enough. I turn, therefore, to a second misconception, namely, this—

<sup>1</sup> In *Church or Chapel?* chaps. xxxiv., xxxv.



II. *That the laying on of hands being, as it is assumed, for the conveyance of miraculous gifts, ought to be no longer administered, seeing that miraculous powers no longer attend its use.* I must here allow, however, that this is a mistake which *some* Dissenters do not make. Some, it is true, object to the imposition of hands both in Confirmation and in Ordination, whilst others allow it in Ordination, and only reject it in the case of Confirmation. But when it *is* rejected, it is rejected principally for the reason just mentioned, and I submit that this involves a prodigious mistake.<sup>1</sup> I affirm that—

1. The laying on of hands is older than the present dispensation of the Holy Ghost. It is one of the earliest of all ordinances; it goes back to the time of the patriarchs (Gen. xlviii. 14). And I observe that it did not then convey *miraculous* gifts—when ministered by Jacob or by Moses—but it did convey *blessing* (vers. 19, 20) and *grace* (Numb. xxvii. 18-23). It is expressly recorded that “Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom, *for* Moses had laid his hands upon him” (Deut. xxxiv. 9).

2. The laying on of our Lord’s hands, of which we hear so much in the Gospels, did not always convey miraculous gifts. *That* was, once at least, for the purpose of *blessing* (St. Mark x. 16). Sometimes it imparted *healing*; sometimes it was the channel of *grace*; sometimes, we cannot doubt, it conveyed both.

3. The laying on of hands ministered in the early

<sup>1</sup> “Let no man pretend that because the miraculous effects of the apostolical imposition of hands are long since ceased, therefore the act is now idle and useless. *Divine institutions are ill measured by sensible operations*” (Bishop Hall, *Cheirothesia*).

Church (Acts viii., xix.) was not for the purpose of bestowing the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, but of conveying the Holy Ghost Himself. It was for "the Holy Ghost," and not merely His extraordinary gifts, that SS. Peter and John prayed (Acts viii. 15). It was "the Holy Ghost," and not merely the "gifts," that the Samaritans received<sup>1</sup> (ver. 17). The narrative everywhere speaks of the Spirit; nowhere of the mere gifts which then attended the Spirit's steps. So again in chap. xix. It was "the Holy Ghost" that was given through the imposition of St. Paul's hands, though along with the Holy Ghost and from the Holy Ghost came the tongues and the prophecies. The tongues and the prophecies were not the Spirit, nor yet the graces or the fruits of the Spirit; they were only the signs of His presence and the proofs of His power.<sup>2</sup>

And what has led Dissenters to suppose that the laying on of hands was merely for the purpose of conveying miraculous gifts is the bare circumstance just mentioned, that in those days such gifts and signs ever marked the Spirit's coming or indwelling. They did so at our Lord's baptism, on the day of Pentecost, in the house of Cornelius, and at prayers and prophesying,<sup>3</sup> no less than after the imposition of hands. They

<sup>1</sup> "This giving of the Holy Ghost by imposition of the apostles' hands was not for a miraculous gift, but an ordinary grace. *For St. Philip could and did do miracles enough, but this grace he could not give*" (Jeremy Taylor).

<sup>2</sup> "The Holy Ghost being to continue for ever and the promise of universal concernment, this way also of its communication . . . is also *perpetuum ministerium*, to be succeeded to and to abide for ever" (*ibid.*).

<sup>3</sup> "The apostles' preaching was attended by miracles . . . yet

were signs to those who otherwise would have disbelieved (1 Cor. xiv. 22). How were men so much as to know that there was any Holy Ghost, or that He was given, if there were no outward and visible tokens of His presence? So the laying on of hands, after prayer for the Holy Ghost, conveyed the HOLY GHOST to the baptized, and it conveyed at the same time the miraculous gifts; but that it was ministered *for the sake* of these gifts is a pure misconception, for which there is no shadow of proof. What *are* these gifts, indeed, in comparison with the fruits of the Spirit (1 Cor. xiii.)?

And that this is so is established by two further considerations, namely—

4. The laying on of hands is mentioned in Heb. vi. 2—in what Jeremy Taylor quaintly calls “St. Paul’s Catechism”—as one of the six fundamentals or “first principles of Christ.” The others are “repentance,” “faith,” “the teaching of baptisms . . . and of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment.” Such is the estimation in which this ordinance, which they tell us ought to be dropped, is held in Holy Writ. It is classed with prime essentials, and with things which were for all time; it is reckoned amongst “principles” and “foundations.” But, obviously, if the laying on of hands was only ministered for the bestowal of supernatural and external gifts—ministered, that is to say, for a temporary and comparatively trivial purpose—it could not have been so classified or so described. In

I hope preaching must now cease, because no miracles are done” (Jeremy Taylor). See Heb. ii. 4, “God also bearing them witness with . . . gifts of the Holy Ghost.”

that case, the sacred writer has greatly deceived himself and us—the laying on of hands is by no means entitled to the place which he has assigned it. In that case, it is he (and not Nonconformists) that is labouring under a mistake, for he has ranked a mere temporary form with things of eternal obligation.<sup>1</sup> Finally—

5. If the laying on of hands was merely for the impartation of miraculous gifts, then—as Nonconformists justly argue—no doubt it should have ceased when the gifts ceased. Yes, it should have ceased, and doubtless it would have ceased, *but it did not*. The gifts ceased, but the rite was continued in the Church. From which it follows either (1) that the rite was not for the sake of the gifts merely, but had some other and more permanent and exalted object in view, as we maintain; or (2) that the early Christians made a huge mistake—a mistake in which the whole Christian world for many centuries participated—when they continued the rite after the reason for it had ceased to exist. We cannot, in fact, say, as it was said at Grindelwald, that the rite should have been dropped when the signs ceased, without saying—to borrow Jeremy Taylor's phrase—that “the whole silly Church of Christ” for all these many hundred years has been grossly deceived.

And what is true of Confirmation is equally true of Ordination; indeed, Confirmation is an ordination, the ordination of the baptized to the priesthood of all

<sup>1</sup> “Dare any Christian presume to say that the apostle, the great and wise master-builder of the Church, mistook the foundation whereon he built? Or dare any one presumptuous soul single out this one article from the rest as merely temporary, when all the rest are granted to be of eternal use?” (Bishop Hall).

believers. The laying on of the apostles' hands, with (1 Tim. iv. 16) or without (Acts vi. 6) the hands of the presbytery, to constitute men officers of the Christian society, is older than the New Testament, or any part of it (Acts vi.), and it has been preserved in the Church ever since. Nor can it be even pretended in this case that it was merely for the conveyance of miraculous gifts. There is not a scrap of evidence for any such contention. Such gifts might, and in some cases no doubt did, accompany it. Still it was clearly the sign and seal of *appointment to office*. It was primarily to "appoint" the seven "over this business" that they "set them before the apostles," who then and there "laid their hands on them" (Acts vi. 3-6). It was to "separate Paul and Barnabas for the work" whereunto they were called that the prophets and teachers at Antioch, at the command of the Holy Ghost, "laid their hands on them" (ch. xiii. 2, 3); and whatever "gift" Timothy had through the putting on of St. Paul's hands (2 Tim. i. 6, cf. 1 Tim. iv. 14), the form he specified or recognized for the appointment of duly commissioned ministers (1 Tim. v. 22, cf. ver. 17) shows that it was thus that he had himself been appointed. Indeed, the laying on of hands as a sign of appointment to office is by no means peculiar to the New Testament. Even the scribes—and this one consideration effectually disposes of the idea that the rite had exclusive reference to miraculous gifts—even the scribes were set apart to their office with the *Semichah*. "The presiding rabbi pronounced\* the formula, 'I admit thee, and thou art admitted to the chair of the scribe,' solemnly ordained him by the imposition of hands, and gave to him

tablets,"<sup>1</sup> etc. It is, consequently, altogether too much to expect us to believe that the laying on of hands in the age of the apostles was merely for the impartation of miraculous gifts, seeing that we find it a recognized and long-established mode of appointment to office amongst the Jews of that day. And to say, as some divines did at Grindelwald, that they allow of no ordination but "the laying on of Divine hands," grandiloquent and spiritual as it may sound, is really to contradict the plain warrants of the New Testament. Are we to understand that the Apostles (Acts vi. 6) were ignorant or unspiritual? Are we to conclude that Paul and Barnabas ought *not* to have been set apart to their work by the imposition of hands (ch. xiii. 2)? The fact is, our Nonconformist brethren constantly, though quite unwittingly, set up for being wiser or more spiritual than our Lord and His apostles. To say, as a Dissenting organ<sup>2</sup> has said, that the laying on of hands, "if not superstitious, ministers to superstition," is not to condemn the Church merely, or the practice of almost universal Christendom merely; it is really to accuse the Lord that bought us of ignorance and weakness; it is to charge the apostles of our Lord and Saviour with unspirituality and credulity.

A third misconception, and one connected with ordination is—

### III. *That the piety and gifts of Nonconformist preachers*

<sup>1</sup> *Dict. of the Bible*, Art., "Scribe": "He has been solemnly ordained with the *laying on of hands*, and is the *Rabbi*, 'My great one,' Master, *amplitulo*." Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i. p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *The Nonconformist and Independent*, March 6, 1884.



are proofs in themselves of their ministerial position;<sup>1</sup> proofs that they are lawfully and regularly appointed ambassadors of Christ. It was said at Grindelwald—I believe it is often said—that if you take haphazard any five hundred of the clergy and compare them with any five hundred Nonconformist ministers, also chosen haphazard, the latter, both in point of piety and of ability, will be found the equals, if not the superiors of the former; and it is argued from this circumstance that the latter are just as much Christ's ministers as the former. But indeed the question of Orders is constantly sought to be settled in a summary sort of *solvitur ambulando* fashion. It is supposed to be quite sufficient to show the absurdity and arrogance of our view that we presume to deny that such men as Allon and Spurgeon and Maclaren are or were duly ordained ministers of Christ's Church. It is necessary consequently that this claim should be carefully examined.<sup>2</sup> I therefore observe—

1. Piety and gifts may prove that certain men have eminent *qualifications* for the ministry, but they cannot possibly prove that these men have been *appointed* ministers, if there *is* any such thing as a formal and outward appointment of any kind.

2. And all Dissenters allow that an appointment of *some kind* is necessary. Most of them retain, or have revived—the Wesleyan Methodists and Congregationalists have—the laying on of hands;<sup>3</sup> others see an appoint-

<sup>1</sup> I have already glanced at this mistake at p. 18 above.

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed this question more fully in a tract, entitled, *Are they Ministers of Christ?* C. Taylor, Warwick Lane.

<sup>3</sup> Of late years some Congregationalists have declined this "ceremony."

ment in the call of the congregation or the sanction of the Conference ; some ministers, it is true, have had no other formality than a recognition service, or a friendly tea meeting ; but a formality of some kind, if only a call, there must be ; otherwise no one could say who was and who was not a Nonconformist pastor. Even the Baptists and others, who affirm that they *make* no appointment to the ministry, but merely *recognize* one already made by God, do nevertheless openly and publicly designate their pastors to their respective pastorates.

3. Now the persons thus appointed or recognized as Dissenting ministers are not always, perhaps not often, the most holy or the most gifted men in the denominations. This goes without saying. No Nonconformist will deny that some persons who are not ministers, and have never claimed to be, are much more spiritual and able than some who are pastors. I do not suppose that any pastor assumes, as a matter of course, that his gifts and his piety must necessarily exceed those of any and every member of his flock. Most of them would readily allow that there may be, and probably are, among their hearers, many holier and wiser men than they.

4. But if so, what becomes of the claim to be recognized as ministers of Christ because of piety and gifts ? *It falls to the ground at once.* The moment you admit—and it must be admitted ; where is the Dissenter who will deny it?—that there may be in the congregations men equally qualified in respect of religious and intellectual attainments with their pastors, who nevertheless are not pastors, that moment there is an end to the claim that such attainments are to be accepted as proofs

of appointment. Dissenters do not accept them as any proofs themselves; they would be astonished if you asked them so to do; their ministers are the men who have been *called* or *appointed*, not the men best fitted for the work. Nor do they accept success in preaching as any proof. There are many Wesleyan local preachers, it will be readily admitted, whose labours have been more fruitful than those of the "ordained" ministers, but if we turned the tables upon them, and insisted that such success was a plain proof that they were ordained, they would at once range themselves on the other side, they would deny that they were regular ministers. It is incontestable that Dissenters who insist that *we* shall not question the orders of their learned and able divines, because of their learning and ability and sanctity, do not recognize either learning or ability or sanctity as any proof whatsoever of appointment or admission to the ministries of their respective denominations.

5. But the matter is capable of a yet more simple and cogent proof. You ask us to recognize, say, Mr. Spurgeon or Dr. Parker, because of their eminent piety and gifts. Then what of Judas Iscariot; what of Annas and Caiaphas; what of the scribes who sate in Moses' seat (St. Matt. xxiii. 1-3); what of the sons of Eli? Are we altogether wrong in believing that Judas *was* one of the twelve apostles or that Annas and Caiaphas *were* high priests? Yet you cannot say much for their piety or success. And what of Lord Shaftesbury, and Lord Cairns, and Mr. Gladstone, and many more such Churchmen? No one questions their singular devoutness or capacity. Are they, then, ministers of Christ? Surely, if *qualifications* for the ministerial office are to be

the test of holding it, Dissenters are not exempt from that arrogance and bigotry of which they accuse us, when they deny that such men are lawfully and fully accredited ministers of the Church of England or of the Church of Christ. It is true they do not *claim* to be such, but it can hardly be contended that it is the bare claim that makes all the difference.

The fact is, that the contention that we must concede the *status* of "ministers" to these men or those on the ground of their virtues and qualifications, just like the demand that we should allow separatist communities to be "churches," on the ground of piety of the members or the good work which they have done, is entirely at variance with the spirit and teaching of Holy Scripture and of common sense. The community which the Old Testament calls upon me to recognize as God's Church was in no way conspicuous for its piety or success; it was rather conspicuous for its unfaithfulness and idolatry (Numb. xiv. 27; Deut. ix. 6; Acts vii. 51, etc.). The men, again, whom it designates as God's priests, were in no way eminent for their gifts or graces; they were rather remarkable for their misconduct and errors (1 Sam. ii. 14, 28; Isa. xxviii. 7; Jer. v. 31; xiii. 13; xxiii. 11; Mal. i. 6). Similarly, the communities which the New Testament calls "Churches of God" are not so called because of their piety; they are so called in spite of their impiety, their immoralities, and idolatries (1 Cor. i. 1, v. 1; Rev. ii. 18, iii. 1, 14, etc.); and the men who were the apostles of Christ were of like passions and like frailties with other men (St. Matt. xvi. 8, 23, xxvi. 31, 56; St. Mark ix. 34; St. John xx. 25; Gal. ii. 14); they were not made apostles by virtue of

steeped in evil tendencies? Or am I to conclude that the priest's office or work was innocent and edifying enough *then*, but has since become harmful? You would have imagined, had you heard the Grindelwald discussions, that a sacrificing priest was a creature of the devil, and that sacerdotalism of any sort proceeded from the pit. And yet both the Jewish *cohen*, *sacerdos*, and his Jewish sacerdotalism were "from heaven," and not "of men."

2. The Jewish priesthood contradicted no reasonable or evangelical principles: it did nothing to imperil the salvation of souls; it promised no pardon, for example, to the impenitent; it attached no magical efficacy to mere forms. Though it offered sacrifices, it never pretended that it was "possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb. x. 4). Though the priests lifted their hands and blessed the people (Numb. vi. 23), they never pretended to bless in their own name or by their own power. Though they pronounced absolution and restoration to the leper (Lev. xiii. 34, 37), they never claimed to make clean those who were not clean already; though they poured the blood at the foot of the altar, they never insinuated that it had any merit of its own; they did it as a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ. And so with all their functions. Theirs was a reasonable service. But if so, on what grounds is it assumed—for it is pure assumption—that strictly analogous acts and ordinances on the part of Christians must be unreasonable and superstitious? If it was reasonable and evangelical to plead the passion of our Lord by means of *sacrifices*, why must the idea of pleading it by means of *sacraments*—

similar, but simpler outward and visible signs—be so irrational? Do the clergy claim that because they are “priests,” the sacraments they offer can profit the impenitent, or heal souls *ex opere operato*; do they pretend to offer Christ over again, or that the “Christian sacrifice” involves any *death*? What, again, if they claim to “bless,” as the Jewish priest did; can they bless whom God hath not blessed? Can they go beyond His commandment to do less or more? What, too, if they claim to absolve, as the Jewish priest absolved the leper; can they convey pardon to any who are unfit for pardon; to any who are not already pardoned in the purpose of God? No; the fact is, that all this outcry about the clergy claiming to be “sacrificing priests” is pure ignorance or crass prejudice. If they claim to do *everything* which the Jewish priest did, and to be everything which the Jewish priest was, it cannot be shown that the claim is fraught with any danger.

V. With the question of *Sponsors*, which I propose to take next, a whole crop of misconceptions are connected. Some of them, it is true, are only current among the less educated; but I do not observe that lack of theological education, or, indeed, of education of any kind, is, ordinarily, any bar either to forming strong opinions on points of doctrine or to expressing them with oracular certainty. I must confine myself, however, to two or three particulars, and these the main particulars cited against us.

1. And, first, it is objected that the sponsor is intruded into the place which belongs to the parent. The idea in many minds is that he is intended to take the religious oversight of the child out of the parents' hands,



that the godparent, in fact, overrides the parent in the things of God. There are few of the clergy, I imagine, who have not at some time or other met with the objection, "I don't hold with sponsors. I think the parents are the proper persons to answer for their children." To which the reply is: First, the parents can, if they prefer it, answer for their own children. There is nothing to prevent it now, if there was once. Secondly, nothing can relieve the parents of their responsibility. Just as they are responsible for the nurture and education, so are they accountable to God for the religious training of their children, and no third person can absolve them from this obligation. The sponsor is, and can only be, *an additional security*; he is not to supersede the parent, but he is there to *fall back upon* in case the parent dies or (as often happens) neglects his duties. And if the parent does neither, still every child needs line upon line and precept upon precept, and if we can get any Christian person to care for its soul, so much the better; it is a distinct gain. This is the *rationale* of sponsors.<sup>1</sup>

2. It is alleged that the office of sponsor is sometimes undertaken by persons who are entirely unfit for the

<sup>1</sup> That this is no private interpretation is evident from the words of Wheatley (*On the Book of Common Prayer*, p. 396), "The parents are already engaged under such strict bonds, both by nature and religion, to take care of their children's education, that the Church does not think that she can lay them under greater, but still makes provision that if," etc., and Humphry (*Historical and Explanatory Treatise*, p. 219), "The intention manifestly is not to exonerate the parents . . . but the object of the regulation" [the 29th canon, which forbids parents to be godparents to their own children] "is to provide an additional security," etc.

post. To this we plead guilty; we must sorrowfully allow that it is so. But we venture to remark, first, that the sponsor's duties are often misunderstood. A man can "call upon a child to hear sermons," can "provide that he may learn the Creed," etc., may even arrange (if there are no parents to do it) to have the child "Christianly and virtuously brought up," without being a model of all the virtues himself. Of course, he ought to be this—we do not deny that for a moment; all we say is that he may discharge a sponsor's part and duty if he is not. Secondly, we remark that the law of the Church is that sponsors should be communicants.<sup>1</sup> And, lastly, we observe that you cannot, do what you will, ensure that all the persons taking part in *any* religious function are fit for the work. I do not know that the office of a sponsor is one whit more solemn or more spiritual than that, say, of a choirman or of any member of the congregation who sings the praises of God. Yet, will any Dissenter pretend that their choirs and congregations contain no unfit persons—no persons, *i.e.*, unfitted to offer as priests the sacrifice of praise?<sup>2</sup> And if not, where is the difference? *Dat veniam corvis*, etc.

3. But the head and front of our offending<sup>3</sup> is that the sponsors, in their answers, promise what they cannot perform, or what they cannot be sure that the child will perform. This is the great objection taken to this office.

<sup>1</sup> Canon 29.

<sup>2</sup> A Puritan divine observed bluntly that "the devil hath a freehold in every singing-pew in the kingdom."

<sup>3</sup> I do not attempt to deal here with the question of Baptismal Regeneration. I have dealt with it in *Church or Chapel?* chaps. xxvii.—xxix.

Within the last few weeks a Nonconformist has propounded to me this difficulty: "How can one man renounce the devil for another?" He tells me that the promise so to do appears to him and to thousands of others to be "a big thumping lie," and he informs me that this is the kind of thing which makes and keeps men Dissenters. I will therefore do my best to answer his question.

I might, of course, did I want to brush this question aside, have asked my correspondent: "How can one man be baptized for another, and that a dead man?" Yet St. Paul says it was done, and he mentions the practice as prevailing without the faintest disapproval. I think it better, however, as I hope it may remove some misconceptions, to take the question as it stands, and to grapple with it boldly.

I begin by observing that no sponsor does renounce the devil, or promise anything else *for* the child, except in the sense of speaking for and representing the child. The baptismal promises are the promises not of the sponsors, but of the children; the sponsor is but a proxy, a spokesman, a mouthpiece—that is all. The godparents are sureties—sureties for the child's being brought up as a Christian—and they are proxies; they answer for the child, but they promise nothing for themselves. The service is perfectly clear on this point. It does not say, "*You must promise* for this infant that he will renounce," etc.; its language is, "*This infant must* also faithfully for his part *promise by you*, that are his sureties, that *he*," etc. And so the first question stands: "Dost thou, *in the name* of this child"—not in your own name at all, but in his, as his spokesman—"renounce

the devil," etc. And if any doubt remained on the point, the third question and answer would set it at rest: "Wilt thou be baptized in this faith? Answer: That is my desire." The sponsor cannot desire to be baptized—he has been baptized long ago; it is the child, speaking by him, who answers thus. And with this view the latter portion of the service is in full agreement: "Forasmuch as *this child* hath promised *by you*," etc.; and the Catechism speaks to the same effect: "Why then are infants baptized," etc.? "Because *they* promise them both [repentance and faith] by their sureties," etc.—not "because the sureties promise for them." I think it will be allowed, in the face of these testimonies, that the sponsors do not "renounce the devil," etc., for the infant; the infant renounces by the mouth of the sponsors.

But now it will be objected: "This, if anything, increases the difficulty, for we now find that the service ascribes these solemn promises to an unconscious child; *he* promises through others, and promises what no man can be sure that he will perform."

Let us take the last point first. It is said that the infant is made or allowed to promise what there can be no certainty of his performing. But the same remark applies to all such promises, to all *vows*. It applies to the promises made by the adult who is baptized no less than to those of the child. No man can promise to God, that is to say, absolutely and unconditionally. He can only promise repentance and obedience on two conditions, namely, first, that God gives him the needful grace; and, secondly, that he himself uses that grace, and co-operates with it when given. Is there one of

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us can promise a Christian life except with these limitations? Sometimes we *express* them, we *mention* them, as in the case of the promise made by those of riper years: "I will endeavour so to do, *the Lord being my helper.*" Sometimes we do not mention them, but they are understood. They are understood in this case—of course they are; why should the adult be more dependent on God's grace than the child? When, therefore, the promise to "renounce the devil," etc., or to "keep God's holy will and commandments," is made, it is made subject to these limitations—that God gives His help, and also gives a ready will to use it. In other words, the promise is only made, can only be made, in dependence on Divine grace. The child will perform if it has and uses God's help, not otherwise.

But it seems an unreality, a fiction, we are told, to exact these promises from an unconscious child. An adult can promise; an infant cannot. What reply shall we make to this objection?

Our reply is this, that whether the promises are spoken or not, really makes very little difference, because they are and must be understood. Suppose we exacted no promise whatsoever from the infant, still he is "baptized unto Christ," and baptism unto Christ means—it cannot mean less than repentance and faith and obedience. It may be a mistake to baptize children—that is quite another thing, and it is a point which I do not raise now;<sup>1</sup> but if we do baptize them, we can only baptize them subject to the conditions which are attached to baptism. It may not be necessary to express these conditions at each baptism, but whether they are

<sup>1</sup> See *Church or Chapel?* chap. xxv.

expressed or not, there they are, and there is no escape from them. Without them, baptism would be a mockery. So that, if no promises were made at the baptism of a child—none are made at a private baptism—the child is just as much bound; the same promises, neither more nor less, are always and in every case understood. It would be *understood* that the child is to “renounce the devil,” etc.; it would be *understood* that he will keep God’s commandments. Without this tacit understanding, it would be wrong to baptize him. If he is going to live like a pagan, he must not be baptized into Christ.

The real question, therefore, which we have to discuss is this: Are there any reasons why the promises and engagements which baptism always involves, should be *expressed* at the baptism of a child—any reasons why they should be formally stated? We affirm that there are such reasons.

One is this—it is the reason given in the rubric why baptism should be administered “when the most number of people come together”—“that every man present may be put in remembrance of his own profession made to God in his baptism;” that the rite, in fact, may be made instructive and impressive; that each man may hear what are the obligations of a Christian, and what he owes to his Maker.

But another, and perhaps a much weightier reason is, that the child may have an additional solemn obligation and incentive to a Christian life. This is why his promises are made and not merely understood—that he may be bound by a fresh and threefold cord to God. He must know—and how otherwise can he so forcibly be taught—the root idea of all religion, that God has



made a covenant with Christian men ; that baptism is the seal of this covenant ; that into that covenant he has been admitted ; that its obligations are upon him ; that they were formally stated, they were put into his lips to bind him to fulfil them. He is thus not left in any doubt as to what he must believe and do ; he has already engaged to believe and to do these things and no others. His godparents, as his representatives, have undertaken them in his behalf. In fact, the covenant to which baptism admits him would have been, if not imperfect, imperfectly stated, and might therefore have been imperfectly understood without some such arrangement. And there is this fitness in it : "our Lord Jesus Christ has promised in His gospel" the covenant blessings. *They* have been recited by His representatives and ambassadors, before the covenant was sealed. How suitable, therefore, that the child, by his representatives, should acknowledge the covenant obligations. Where is the unreality, where the absurdity of this, if we really believe that baptism does bring into the bond of the covenant, and that that covenant is the most blessed provision and privilege in the world.

And we arrive at a similar conclusion from considering another aspect of Holy Baptism, namely, that it admits into Christ's society, Christ's school. The child is about to be "made a *disciple*," or learner, in Christ's appointed way (St. Matt. xxviii. 19). It is not everybody that is to enter that school ; it is only for those who are willing to be taught, and who will submit to its rules. The very members of the society (*i.e.* the Church) are entitled to some assurances on this point. And what better plan can be devised than that the candidate for membership

should himself promise, through his proxies and sureties, conformity to its laws and regulations? It is precisely what is done in daily life—done in apprenticeships and the like—and we never hear that any exception is taken to it there. No one objects that promises should be made by others for minors—for *infants* in the eye of the law—provided it is for their advantage. The parents or guardians would be severely blamed who lost an inheritance for their child on the ground that they did not approve of making engagements which he might possibly not care to fulfil. And are not the blessings of the baptismal covenant at least *equal* to any temporal advantages that ever have been or can be secured through the aid of sureties and trustees?

But, let me add, even supposing that this is not the best possible way of bringing home to the child and to the community the obligations which baptism entails, is this institution, we may still ask, on that account to be reprobated, and flouted, and ridiculed, as is too often the case? It is a strange thing, the almost eager delight, or, at any rate, the intense satisfaction some Christians (save the mark!) exhibit if they can, or think they can, discover anything imperfect or unwise in the ordinances and arrangements of their fellow-Christians, especially, I have sometimes thought, if they happen to belong to the old Society of God. You would have thought that, if this institution of sponsors, or the rite of Confirmation, or the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, or anything of the kind, is really so superstitious or so supremely ridiculous as it is sometimes assumed to be, it would only occasion to other Christians profound distress and confusion; you would have expected them to speak of

it with bated breath ; you would have looked for excuses and apologies rather than exposures and denunciations—you would have expected it for CHRIST's sake. I repeat, this order of godparents may not be the best plan that could be devised—though I myself cannot imagine a better—but it bears on the face of it evidence of the Church's tender solicitude for her children, of her great desire to commit them to a Christian life, and, as such, even "the dissidence of Dissent" might regard it with respect. I may perhaps have failed to show that Non-conformists make "mistakes" about the baptismal office, but there can be no doubt as to their making a prodigious mistake, if they exult (and they sometimes do) over the supposed errors and ignorances of the Church. That may be good for sectarianism, but it is very bad for Christianity.

VI. A difficulty was raised at Grindelwald about absolution. Not about the message,<sup>1</sup> but *about our restricting its delivery to the order of "priests."* "Why," it was asked, "may not the churchwarden pronounce it as well as the clergy"?

It is not, perhaps, very material to observe, except as showing how much Dissenters differ amongst themselves, and how one denomination supplies a justification of the Church against the rest, that the Wesleyans at any rate cannot take this ground, for they do just what the Church does. That is to say, when Matins are said in their chapels, as is the case in London, the "travelling preacher" may pronounce the absolution, but the local preacher may not. *They* do not, whatever their reasons

<sup>1</sup> I have discussed the principle of Absolution and the Church's Forms of Absolution in *Church or Chapel?* chaps. xxxiv.-xxxvi.

may be, permit the churchwardens, or any such person—they only allow men whom they hold to be ministers, to take these words into their lips.

And other Dissenters, though the absolution is unknown amongst them, do not throw open everything in the service to everybody, nor do they employ the deacons or the stewards to proclaim the gospel message. But why not—why not the doorkeeper or the pew-opener? He may be as gifted as the minister—I remember one who was quite a theologian; but if he had claimed to occupy the pulpit in virtue of his gifts, or because all Christians are priests, there would have been no small stir in that chapel. He would soon have been reminded that that was the *minister's* business and not his. They must have order at the chapel, as well as at the church.

And the reason why the churchwarden or deacon may not pronounce the absolution *is* a matter of order or orders. He has not been appointed to that function, and another has been appointed—appointed by Christ. It was not to all the disciples, nor was it to those disciples who served tables, it was to the apostles, that our Lord said, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted," etc. And if we believe, as we do, that the successors of the apostles have succeeded, and others have not, to this duty—the duty of declaring and conveying God's pardon to the penitent, and so fulfilling the ministry of reconciliation—we should like to know what there is superstitious or absurd in such a belief? It is at least a belief which has been held by some of the wisest and best of mankind.

In fact, it comes to this: Has Christ committed the ministry of reconciliation to *every* member of His

Church, or are some men ambassadors to the rest? In other words, Is there a ministry or not? The question, "Why not the churchwarden?" may soon be answered. The answer is: Because churchwardens and others are not "ambassadors of Christ;" are not the teachers and rulers (Acts xx. 28; Heb. xiii. 17) of the Church; have not "received this ministry"; they are of the sheep and not of the shepherds (1 Pet. v. 2; St. John xxi. 16, 17); they are of the disciples, or learners, and not of the apostles, or messengers; they are of those who should receive the word (St. James i. 21), not of those who preach it (2 Tim. iv. 2).

One misconception more and my present task is at an end. I have to remark in the last place that—

VII. *Nonconformists are entirely deceived in thinking that the burial difficulty is peculiar to the Church, or is a greater difficulty for the Church than for the Chapel.* They express much righteous indignation that we can consent to use the beautiful words of the Burial Office over a confirmed drunkard or a felon, and they give us to understand that nothing would induce *them* to do anything of the kind. I shall hope to show, however, that they either do much as we do, or that, if they do not, they are betrayed into doing something a good deal worse.

But, first, let us see what it is that the ministers of the English Church really do when they read "the Order for the Burial of the Dead." They read a sober and scriptural service for the edification and comfort of the *mourners*—for the office is framed for the benefit of the living, not the dead—a service which speaks of the blessedness of the dead in Christ, and in the course of it they express

a *hope* that those whom they are committing to the ground have died "in the Lord." They do this, but they do no more.

They do *not* express any "sure and certain hope of" this or that man's "resurrection to eternal life": their sure and certain hope is "of *the* resurrection." For there *is* a "resurrection to eternal life," whether he or we are partakers of it or not.

They do *not* say (as Dissenters often do) that the dead man is "in heaven": still less, as Dr. Parker is so fond of saying, that he is "ascended"—because they do not know; they and their judgments are fallible, and therefore it is not for them to pronounce on any man's state (1 Cor. iv. 5; Rom. xiv. 4); but they do say that God has "taken to Himself the soul" of the departed, because all souls are His (Ezek. xviii. 4), and "all live unto Him," and the spirits of all return unto God who gave them (Eccles. xii. 7).

They do *not* say that this dead person was a converted man, or a favourite of heaven, or was "saved"; they do call him a "dear brother," because he is, by virtue of his baptism, one of "the brethren"; because he is with them the son and offspring of God, and a brother for whom Christ died (Rom. xiv. 15).

And so far from expressing any *certainty* as to his present state, or any judgment concerning it, they say expressly that their "hope" is that he rests in Christ. And that is all.

Very good. Then I proceed to show that Dissenting ministers often do themselves what they blame us for doing.

I will not insist on the fact, though I might do so



with perfect justice, that they very readily and cheerfully use words of hope, yes, and sometimes of certainty, about men who in God's sight were every whit as bad as this drunkard or this felon. For I do not gather from the Bible that these *conspicuous* sins, these scandals which so much shock *us*, are at all more heinous or hateful to God than pride and smug self-complacency and unreality and insincerity, sins from which popular preachers are not always exempt. For my part, I would as soon take my chance with some drunkards and criminals that I have known, as with some Dissenting divines that I could name, and some clergy. So far as I can judge, these publicans and harlots are just as near to the kingdom of God as these chief priests and elders (St. Matt. xxi. 31). But who makes any difficulty about officiating at the funerals of the latter? Why, everybody would cry shame upon us if we did; they would say, and say justly, that we were setting up for being judges. Then why are words of faith and hope so readily used in the one case, which are yet so reprehensible in the other? But this in passing. I proceed to observe that, as a matter of fact, the Dissenting minister does not refuse, as a rule, to conduct a Christian service over these *mauvais sujets*, when asked so to do—I grant that it is comparatively seldom that he is asked. How can he refuse? Can he deny the mourners what comfort the service would bring to them; can he decide that their dead husband or brother or son is to be buried like a dog? Anyhow, so far as my experience goes, he does not refuse; no, he does much what the clergyman does. He conducts a service, that is to say, and he uses much the same words as in other cases. I do not pretend that he

is as confident and complimentary as in other cases, but I say that he does not make any very *marked* difference in the service; he does not shut the door of hope. He would think it extremely bad taste so to do; he would be thought brutal to do it at such a time; besides, in most cases, he has far too much sense to measure the mercy of God with his poor line and plummet. I repeat, therefore, that he does much what the parish priest has to do, or, if he acts otherwise, he does much worse. For it is distinctly worse to refuse the survivors any service whatsoever, and it is distinctly worse to use that service as an opportunity for reflecting on the dead, or in any way suggesting that he is damned. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*

And there is another way in which he does worse—worse, perhaps, than by merely harrowing the feelings of the friends, who have sorrow enough at such a time, or than by taking upon himself the office of the Supreme Judge. He brings the Christian ministry into contempt; he exposes it to the charge of cowardice. To excommunicate men—as the denial of burial rites practically does—to excommunicate men *post-mortem*, upon whom the censures of the Church were not brought to bear while they lived, strikes everybody as a cowardly thing to do, because it is waiting to deal the blow until the man can no longer defend himself. It may be, and it is, a most difficult thing to exercise discipline upon the living,<sup>1</sup> but it is unspeakably mean to restrict its exercise

<sup>1</sup> “It is far easier to separate or complain for want of discipline, than to find out a due way to restore it” (Stillingfleet, *Unreasonableness of Separation*, p. 279). Baxter (*Of Confirmation*, p. 174) has shown the almost insuperable difficulties which attend its exercise. It exasperates those who most need it: it benefits those who need it least.

to the dead. I do not allow, therefore, that Dissenters have any advantage over Churchmen, in the matter of the Burial Office. On the contrary, I hold that this sound and sober form of words, a form which would never have been objected to, had not men persisted in applying to the dead words which were meant for the living, gives us an immense advantage over the man who is left to his own resources, left to improvise a service, or to refuse one altogether when the dead, in his fallible judgment, have not died in the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

And here I propose to stop. I cannot flatter myself that I have by any means exhausted the list of Nonconformist strictures—*quae perscribere longum est*—on the Church, but I have at any rate attempted to grapple with their *principal* difficulties. If I have omitted to notice any of their standing and chartered grievances, it is purely through oversight. The reader must also be good enough to remember that this is, after all, but a sort of supplementary list; this is not the first time that I have taken in hand to consider the difficulties and dilemmas of Dissenters.

And I have called these beliefs and attitudes of our separated brethren by the name of “misconceptions” and “mistakes.” I am firmly persuaded that they are such, and I have here given my reasons for holding them to be such. It is not, of course, for me to say that these reasons are valid and incontrovertible, but I may be forgiven for believing that they are unanswerable until they are answered. If they can be disproved, then the sooner the better: the Dissenter who dislodges

<sup>1</sup> I have dealt with other objections brought against this office in *Church or Chapel?* ch. xlii.

me from an untenable position will do both me and the truth a service. If the misconceptions and mistakes are really on *our* part instead of theirs, then it is high time that we knew it.

Not, let me say, that I should regret the attempt which I have made in these pages to remove some of the barriers which separate Christian brothers, even if it should appear that *some* of the solutions which I have suggested are inadequate, or that some of the "mistakes" which I have challenged are no mistakes at all. I cannot think that any harm can come of a courteous and tolerant and affectionate expression of opinion, on the part of Christian to Christian, and I am not conscious of having written in any other spirit than this.

I say "*some* of the solutions," for I must ask the reader to observe that it is one peculiarity of this *apologia* that each subject discussed stands by itself. The topics of which I have treated are *not* like so many links in a chain, so connected that if one snaps the whole gives way, but each is practically independent of the rest. If, therefore, I have failed in any one instance to grapple successfully with a Nonconformist misbelief, it does not follow that I have not succeeded in other instances, and I must beg that the whole work be not discredited or damned because of one real or alleged failure. If I only succeed in removing *one* obstacle, that is something—it is a step towards reunion and peace—and on the testimony of Dissenters themselves, my former efforts in this direction have not been altogether fruitless.<sup>1</sup> I

<sup>1</sup> "On several *matters of importance*, Mr. Hammond, in this elaborate and scholarly treatise, has succeeded in removing misapprehensions" (*British Weekly*, January 31, 1890). [The italics are mine.]

may, therefore, hope that if some parts of this treatise do not carry conviction to the Nonconformist conscience, other portions will.

But what if I should fail altogether; what if I do not succeed, in any single particular, in proving to Dissenters that they are labouring under a mistake, either in their estimate of the Church or of its teachings? Well, it would not greatly surprise me to learn that much, very much, of my labour had been in vain, so far as Nonconformists are concerned. For, in the first place, taught by experience, I am tempted to despair of even gaining a patient hearing, except in comparatively few instances, from the very men to whom this argument is addressed. They will readily read treatises *against* the Church—that is their *métier*; and they only do what Churchmen do in their turn: each man reads what will confirm him in his own views. There are very few men who will take the trouble to hear the other side. Many of them are secretly afraid of being unsettled in their “views;” afraid that they will not bear a careful scrutiny; afraid, in fact, of being compelled to acknowledge themselves in the wrong. This is always our greatest difficulty; we cannot get our opponents to listen to us. Yes, and I cannot but fear that there is *less* chance of our getting a fair hearing at the hands of Dissenters now than there was a century or even half a century ago. For whilst “orthodox” Dissenters are undoubtedly nearer to the Church, *doctrinally*, than they have ever been before,<sup>1</sup> still the gulf between Church and chapel, instead of

<sup>1</sup> How much nearer they are in externals, in architecture and music, in liturgical forms and in ritual arrangements, each man can see for himself.

closing up, has widened, and their relations are in many ways much more strained. I do not know that it is necessary to consider why this is; and, indeed, the reasons, as it seems to me, are sufficiently obvious. But, whatever the reasons may be, it is, I fear, indisputable that Churchmen and other Christians are more jealous of each other than they have been for a long time past, and, therefore, more disinclined to listen to each other's pleas and apologies. It would not be altogether surprising, consequently, if this appeal to Dissenters fell on heedless ears, nor would it be wonderful if, among those who did read it, it did not make many converts. We have only to remember that every convert so made has to be converted against his will, against all his prepossessions and preferences. I am prepared, therefore, to learn, especially from the rank and file of Dissenting newspapers—who is going to take them in, if they do not loyally uphold the cause?—that there is nothing whatever in my arguments, and that the only mistake which I have succeeded in proving is that it was a mistake on the part of the Grindelwald gathering to listen to me at all. This is, I regret to say it, too often the way of them, and it does not exactly make for righteousness.

But what if I fail, I ask again, to fasten these "mistakes" upon them, and to bring home to them that these are "misconceptions" on their part? Well, then, I come back to *the* mistake, *par excellence*, with which I started,<sup>1</sup> and I say that we have it on the testimony of Dissenters themselves that their leaving the Church was an error. (I do not pretend that they have ever confessed this in so many words, but I say that we are shut up to

<sup>1</sup> Page 5.



this conclusion from their own premisses.) I say that even if our doctrines are everything which they suppose them to be—and they certainly are not that; even if they are as silly or as superstitious as they will have it that they are; and even if, in addition to this, our discipline is as defective and our ritual as Romish as they represent, still the fact remains that, on their own showing, the Church of England, as a Church, has taught nothing and has done nothing to justify the Dissent which has from time to time taken place from her communion. For it is a principle with present-day Dissenters, or with the men of light and leading amongst them,<sup>1</sup> that nothing short of apostasy, of a denial of the faith or some article thereof, on the part of a clear majority of the members, can justify a secession from a Church. They freely allow that a separation has often been made for the most frivolous of reasons or for no reason at all, and they say that this is wrong, that it is wholly inexcusable and unchristian; they also say that nothing can excuse a breach in the Christian body, but the most extreme necessity—nothing, in fact, but a “denial of Christ’s name.” Very good. Then we want to know *when* the English Church has been guilty of this apostasy: when it has “everted the fundamentals” (I borrow their somewhat turgid phrase), *when and how* it has denied “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” In what reign, under what archbishop, was it that the Church did this deed? The question is not whether she teaches *some* grave errors, or has some defects, or is marked by some abuses—all this we may readily admit: the question is whether she has ever

<sup>1</sup> See *British Weekly*, April 20, 1888.

done or taught what, and what alone, *on Dissenting principles*, justifies Dissent. We say that she has never done so—and Dissenters must think the same: if they thought otherwise, they could never speak of her as they do; they would then have to speak of her as they do of the "apostate Church of Rome." No; we contend that whatever her errors, they have not been of a kind to warrant, much less compel, a separation. There is, therefore, one mistake still left for me to advert to and insist on, and it is this—that *they are Dissenters for reasons which Dissenters disallow*. And there is the kindred mistake that, having hastily left the Church and then discovered that they had left it without adequate reason, they take no steps whatever towards returning to its fold. I might indeed argue, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> and as I am profoundly convinced is the truth of God, that nothing can warrant me or any man in leaving the Church of this place or that—provided that it *is* a "Church," a divine institution, and not a "private Christian club"—so long as it is God's Church—and, as already remarked, there is no such thing as a "Church" which is not God's—but it is not necessary to take this ground now. It is enough for my purpose that present-day Dissent is condemned by the professions and principles of present-day Dissenters.<sup>2</sup>

And may I now, as I draw to a close, be permitted to suggest to the Grindelwald Conference—yes, and to the Wesleyan Conference, and the Free Church Congress, and all similar gatherings—that they seem to me and to

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Church*, chaps. xviii. and xxiii.

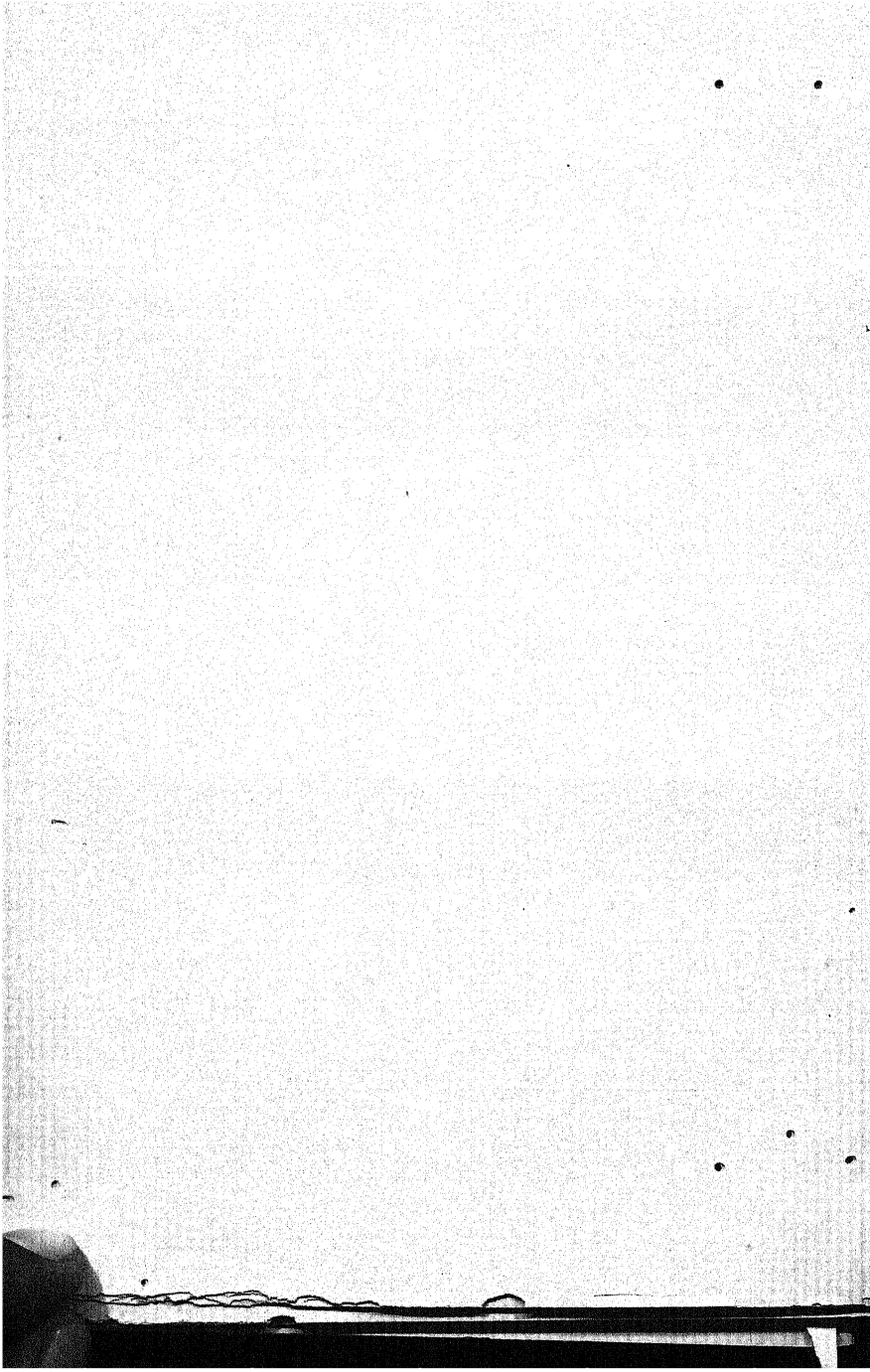
<sup>2</sup> For a more extended treatment of this subject I may be allowed to refer to *English Nonconformity*, chap. xiii.

many Churchmen to touch only the very superficialities of things in their debates, and never to go down to first principles. They go on arguing year after year that this is wrong in the Church, and that that is one of the glories of the chapel—that is to say, they discuss and compare the external features, the accidents, of the various communities of Christians, “the Churches,” as they call them—but they never ask, or if they ask never give a consistent answer to the questions, “What is the Church? What is *God’s* Church? What does the Bible say about it? How many Churches of God are there? How are men admitted to membership? Can a new Church be a true Church? Can Christ’s sacraments admit into Wesley’s Church? When does a Church lose its Church state? So long as it is a Church, can it be right to leave it?” etc. It may well be that these questions are much more easily asked than answered, but all the same these are the questions which must be asked and answered, if ever Christendom is to be reunited, if ever there is to be “one flock” as well as “one Shepherd.” I have pleaded repeatedly that they should have a hearing, and that they should be heard *first*, but somehow they are always shirked.

But enough of these Nonconformist mistakes. It has not been altogether a pleasant or gracious task to enumerate them, and I have only undertaken it in the fervent hope of being able to remove some stumbling-blocks and break down some prejudices, and promote peace and oneness among Christian men. I regard our unhappy divisions as unchristian to the last degree; I see in them a standing menace to religion; I ascribe it to their narrowing and paralyzing influence that

Christianity is so much scorned and is so comparatively sterile. I look for little but jealousy and misery and humiliation and defeat until we can compare our differences and close up our ranks and present a united front to the world. And I am further persuaded that our present differences are largely, very largely, the result of pure misunderstanding—misunderstanding which it only needs patient and kindly and persistent explanation to remove. It was in this belief that I went to Grindelwald, and it is with these convictions that I send forth this volume, born at Grindelwald, to the consideration of all those Christians who are longing and praying for the manifestation of the “one body” of Christ.

THE END.



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